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**AUTHORITARIAN CONSERVATIVE VIEWS ON  
HUMAN NATURE, MORALITY, SEXUALITY,  
RELIGION AND THE STATE**

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**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

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ABSTRACT

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCE

POLITICS

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AUTHORITARIAN CONSERVATIVE VIEWS ON HUMAN NATURE,  
MORALITY, SEXUALITY, RELIGION AND THE STATE

by David Ritchie Wendelken

The thesis is focused on contemporary conservative thought, examining the work of those writers often termed authoritarian\cultural conservatives. In particular it examines the philosophy of Roger Scruton and those theorists associated with The Salisbury Review, together with their historical antecedents e.g. Burke and Hegel. The thesis attempts to uncover whether these writers are united in a single project, and what the purpose of this project is. Because cultural conservatism emphasises the importance of political traditions and cultural forms, the question asked is whether it approximates to a relativistic political philosophy, or if instead there are certain universal or general values it wishes to defend, together with the methods available for this task. The thesis also examines the effect that these theoretical arguments are having on social policy discussions. The thesis examines the areas of human nature, morality, sexuality, and religion, and their consequences for politics.

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## Introduction

What we are supplying are really remarks on the natural history of human beings; we are not contributing curiosities however, but observations which no one has doubted, but which have escaped remark only because they are always before our eyes.

L.Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*,  
No.415

Conservatism as a philosophy and a political doctrine has been subject to much research in an attempt to find common themes or trends within the works of those authors who are characterised as conservative. For example, Greenleaf identifies the "twin inheritance" found within conservative thought; "two antithetical ideas, one *Tory*, the other *Neo-Liberal*."<sup>1</sup> O'Sullivan makes a similar distinction. Following the work of Oakeshott, he identifies two distinct approaches to politics; the ideal of civil association, and idea of social politics. Civil association is a limited style of politics, based on the rule of law and a suspicion of arbitrary power. Social politics involves the adoption of a purpose that is shared by all members of the state, and the role of the state is to further this ideal. Not only is this tension in politics in general, it can also be found in competing claims within conservatism.<sup>2</sup> Quinton, in what is still perhaps the best analysis of conservative political thought, identifies two traditions within which conservative writers operate, one religious and one secular. From either tradition conservative political thought is seen to be based around three principles: an organic view of society; political scepticism about change; a defence of the value of tradition.<sup>3</sup> Whilst most commentators would agree that there are different strands or traditions to be found within conservative thought, it can be argued that there is some disagreement over what

those strands are. Such strands can also be opposed to one another, for example, the neo-liberal tradition identified by Greenleaf can be seen to be in opposition to the organic approach identified by Quinton.

In this thesis I will be examining the work of a number of contemporary conservative theorists who share a variety of related concerns. Not all members of the group share all the same concerns, nor do they all come from the same philosophical background. Instead they should be interpreted more as sharing a family resemblance. Some commentators associate these writers with what has come to be known as the *New Right*. However, this is not a terminology that I make use of as it confuses too many issues and links together people who have disparate values. Eatwell identifies four groupings within the New Right, although he does point out that there is no rigid division between the categories. The four categories that he identifies are: libertarians, who believe in the minimal state; the laissez-faire strand who wish to see a reduction in the activities of the state, but not to the same degree as the libertarians; the traditional wing, who believe that there is a positive role for the state to play, are worried about the growth of individualism, and who believe in the maintenance of traditional institutions such as religion and the family; the mythical wing, emphasising ideas of nation and race, and the *will of the people*.<sup>4</sup>

The writers I shall be examining could be classified around Eatwell's third grouping i.e. traditionalist. However the difficulty with such classifications is illustrated by the fact that some members would have sympathy with the second category, while a few may support a central role for myth in their work. These writers are concerned with traditional issues such as those associated with moral values, cultural identity and questions of integrity and authority. Consequently they are often termed cultural conservatives,



although the term I shall use is authoritarian conservatives.<sup>5</sup> I believe that this is the most appropriate terminology as the writers concerned wish to strengthen the concept of authority within both the state and society, i.e. in morality and politics, as well as offering a defence of particular moral and political values. The focus of my research will be the work of the philosopher, Roger Scruton, and those theorists associated with the journal he edits, *The Salisbury Review*. The writers do not have a single or homogeneous approach, and cannot, in essence, be termed a school. However, they all perceive a malaise in British society, associated with a weakening of traditional moral values, together with an undermining of British culture and identity. Consequently they attack many contemporary social and political theories: questioning the feminist agenda, attacking political correctness, defending traditional education from the demands of irrelevant subjects, and leading a general defence of British identity and sovereignty from the claims of the multi-culturalists and European integrationists. Whilst their ideas are the subject of increasing public debate, their work has not been subject to much critical analysis. It has been subject to rhetorical attack, both from liberals and the left. However, these challenges have tended to be more "political" than "academic".

I have adopted Scruton's work as a focus for my research because he makes use of philosophical method to defend his version of conservatism. Hence it is possible to assess the cogency of his arguments from an analytical philosophical position. However I have not excluded his more popular work, as part of his political project is publicly to debate issues, and raise arguments, which he feels are suppressed. However, this work is of less importance in the thesis. The philosophical influences on Scruton's work are also analysed throughout the thesis. In particular the influence of Kant on his views on religion, Kant and

Wittgenstein on aesthetics and religion, Hegel and Wittgenstein on his views on politics. However, I do not support Covell's thesis that there is a progression in Scruton's work, with him moving from a Kantian stage to an Oakeshottian stage via a Hegelian period.<sup>6</sup> Scruton's response to these philosophers does not change markedly during his work. The approach of his responds to what he sees as the crises\problems at a particular time.

In addition to examining the arguments of Scruton and other contributors to *The Salisbury Review*, I have also discussed the effect these arguments are having on discussions on policy formulation. This is done because whilst many of the above writers are theorists, they also wish to alter public awareness and effect change in society. Consequently I have looked at the work of various right-wing think tanks, in particular the Institute of Economic Affairs Health and Welfare Unit, examining their criticisms of social problems and the policy proposals offered. It should be noted that the aim of the Health and Welfare Unit is to discuss social problems in an attempt to develop a moral agenda for Britain. This stance is in contrast to the earlier work of the Institute, which stressed the primacy of economics in society. Indeed, their view of society was essentially neo-liberal, with resultant cosmopolitan implications. The role of culture was underplayed, with morality being reduced to questions of individual private preferences and choices.

As was mentioned above, authoritarian conservatives support the notion of cultural identity, and are opposed to social theories defending multi-culturalism, as well as political policies favouring European Integration. However, these are not topics I discuss specifically, although issues relating to the importance of cultural identity are present throughout the general argument of the thesis, and in particular when religion is discussed. These issues can be interpreted as being symptomatic of the difficulties facing

British society, but they are not the underlying causes. Their emergence and significance is a reflection of the problems within society, and helps to reinforce the conservative claims of a malaise. Multi-culturalism and political integration have arisen because of the lack of belief in, and the questioning of, ideas about cultural and national identity. At the same time they provide a theoretical platform from which to attack such values. However, the focus of my thesis is to examine the foundational values that conservatives use to support their attitudes on identity and culture, and the philosophical arguments underpinning these attitudes.

In Chapter One I examine conservative views on human nature by looking at the work of Scruton and Casey. In particular I highlight the influence of the work of Hegel and Wittgenstein on Scruton's arguments, especially with regards to the development of self-consciousness, and the public context in which self-consciousness develops. I discuss man's difference from animals through possessing rationality and rationally formulated intentions, and the consequences this has for the state and society, for example in the defence of property rights. I also examine the relationship between this conception of human nature and morality, examining the defence of the objectivity of a rational morality, based on intention and the motivating content from our particular social setting. Hence within the work of Casey there is a strong defence of the virtues. Finally I discuss the difficulties with this approach, and in particular the problem for Scruton of attempting to use the work of Hegel and Wittgenstein to defend a particular set of culturally dependent moral values.

In Chapter Two I examine the nature of sexual desire. This is an area of major importance for conservatives, and in particular Scruton. The weakening of sexual morality and the questioning of established gender roles is viewed as



symptomatic of the malaise in society. According to Scruton, sexual desire is informed by man's nature as a rational being, capable of formulating intentions. Scruton draws on his work on aesthetics to produce an account of sexual desire that requires a particular object of the opposite sex. This idea of opposite is important because within desire there is the attempt to unite and know something which is ultimately unknowable. I also discuss Scruton's account of perversion and his case against homosexuality. Finally I examine the cogency of his defence of a traditional sexual morality based on marriage and fidelity. In critically assessing his arguments I highlight the difficulties he has condemning homosexuality and in providing an appropriate response as to how traditional morality is going to be re-established.

In Chapter Three I examine how the previous discussions on sexual morality are influencing policy debates on the family. I expand on the general thesis that the nuclear family is in decline by offering numerous short and long term reasons for the demise. Finally I analyse what policy proposals are offered to counter this process; whether it is reasonable to take the line offered that as government policies helped to create the situation, so they can be used to help to counter it.

In Chapter Four I consider conservative approaches to religion, identifying a number of positions ranging from open atheism, through the ideas of civic religion, to those committed to the truth and message of Christianity. I also examine the consequences such beliefs have for politics. The relationship between the Established Church and conservatism is analysed, and an account given for why it has deteriorated. The potential tension between religion and politics is highlighted. Finally, I critically assess the proposals offered by conservatives to improve their relationship with the Church, and to attempt to restore its

importance in British society.

In Chapter Five I offer some concluding comments on the overall project of authoritarian conservatives, the cogency of their arguments, together with their practical applicability. Unlike Devigne<sup>7</sup>, I argue that there are certain values that conservatives wish to defend, and that these values are part of a tradition of British culture and identity - its *public doctrine*<sup>8</sup>. The traditional difficulty of the conservative position is that conservatism is usually discussed and defended in "its own idiom." However when the demand to expand and debate issues is made by opponents this abstract nature causes difficulties, "so that when their emptiness is filled out concretely, when they are programmatically cashed, the basic antinomy easily re-enters."<sup>9</sup> Scruton wishes to challenge this dilemma by providing philosophical accounts of conservatism that are accessible and cogent. Indeed one of the purposes of the formulation of the Salisbury Review was to provide a forum for intellectual discussion of conservative issues. However this leaves conservatives with two related problems. Firstly they do not wish there to be a culture of constant debate, yet they are forced to take part in such a culture to allow their views to be heard and defended. Secondly, by allowing issues to be debated there is always the possibility of defeat and the consequent undermining of values seen as fundamental.

Covell argues that by the mid 1980's Scruton had adopted a view of politics in line with Oakeshott's view of the non-purposeful civil association<sup>10</sup>. O'Sullivan does not support this view, instead viewing him as part of the social politics tendency in politics.<sup>11</sup> Within my thesis I support the latter argument. Scruton, and authoritarian conservatives believe that there is a crisis in society and that the state needs to take a proactive role in addressing it and regenerating British society. The civil association



thesis is only practicable when there is a general agreement in moral values. It cannot reverse the trend of moral decay.<sup>12</sup>

## Notes

1. Greenleaf, W.H., The British Political Tradition, Vol. Two, Methuen and Co. Ltd., London, 1983, p.192.
2. O'Sullivan, N., "The New Right: The Quest for a Civil Philosophy in Europe and America", in R. Eatwell and N. O'Sullivan (eds.), The Nature of the Right, Pinter Publishers, London, 1989.
3. Quinton, A., The Politics of Imperfection, Faber and Faber, London, 1978.
4. Eatwell, R., "Right or Rights? The Rise of the 'New Right'", in R. Eatwell and N. O'Sullivan (eds.), The Nature of the Right, Pinter Publishers, London, 1989, p.7.

For a different analysis of the groupings to be found under the heading of the "New Right", see

Cowling, M., "The Sources of the New Right: Irony, Geniality and Malice", Encounter, Vol. 73, November\December 1989, pp.3-13.

5. For a discussion of the use of the term *Authoritarian conservative* see

Cowling, M., "The Sources of the new Right: Irony, Geniality and Malice", Encounter, Vol. 73, November\December 1989, pp.8-13.

In the thesis I will use the term conservative as a shorthand for Authoritarian conservative. Conservatism with a capital "C" will refer to the political party. I hope to make it clear in the text when I am referring to other strands of conservative thought.

6. Covell, C., The Redefinition of Conservatism, Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1986, p.ix.

7. Devigne, R., Recasting Conservatism, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1994, p.2.

8. Cowling, M., "The Present Condition", in M. Cowling (ed.), Conservative Essays, Cassell Ltd., London, 1978, p.21.

9. Greenleaf, op.cit. (Note 1), p.195.

10. Covell, op.cit. (Note 6).

11. O'Sullivan, op.cit., (Note 2), p.180.

12. Devigne, op.cit. (Note 7), p.16.

## Chapter One

### Conservatism, Human Nature and Morality

No theory of politics or political action can ignore or distance itself from a discussion of human nature. The question of what is man and how does he flourish must be at the very bedrock of any discussion of the socio-political arrangements which are being sort. Even those theorists or philosophies that wish to deny a universalist conception of humanity must make assumptions about mankind that are in some way related to the conceptions of the society which they defend as being the one that will develop human potentialities. In this chapter I wish to examine conservative views on human nature, and the consequences this has for their approach to moral philosophy.

The traditional question of "What is man?", immediately raises questions over the significance of the noun concerned; are claims about the separateness of the natures of men and women being openly or tacitly acknowledged<sup>1</sup>. For conservatives the use of the noun man is important and should not be inter-changed or replaced by person. Man is used as a shortened form for mankind, a collective term for both male and females. It describes the species being, but not in any particular social arrangement. "Person" is usually used to describe "man" when he is situated in a particular social arrangement, and has a moral and legal relationship to other persons. Within a social arrangement conservatives tend not to use man, but will discuss the rights of persons, people, citizens etc, or will be specific in identifying men and women. Hence we may talk about the rationality in man, while discussing the differing duties of men and women. As will be seen in this Chapter, as well as in the thesis as a whole, conservatives have a view which leads them to want to highlight the

differences between men and women, and order society so as to reinforce them.

Any discussion on the moral nature of man must involve assumptions about human nature. This is important for theorists who are influenced by religion, as well as those non-religious political thinkers. Within Christian thought man is made in the image of God, yet by his own actions is deemed fallen or morally imperfect. Salvation is achieved through acknowledgement of this condition, and through seeking redemption by belief in God and ordering one's life according to God's commands. A similar approach is found in those thinkers who believe that man can only find redemption on earth, for example Rousseau<sup>2</sup>. Such theorists usually have a more optimistic conception of human nature, arguing that man has been corrupted by an oppressive social and/or economic system, and that salvation can be found by re-ordering society so as to reflect the inherently good nature of man. As will be discussed in the Chapter, some philosophers argue that for man's capabilities to develop he needs social interaction, whilst others argue that his rational faculties are complete outside of society. Not all theorists use human nature as a foundation to their overall theories of the good society. But even these writers must make assumptions about human nature. For example, the liberal society that Rorty describes, and which he claims is not built on a theory of human nature, makes that assumption that man is capable of living happily in a foundationless world of changing values<sup>3</sup>.

Conservative theorists tend to be reticent about offering a formal theory of human nature. This is because, as a philosophy, conservatism is opposed to abstract theorizing, preferring to address concrete examples of human interaction, rather than abstractions. This is a part of the overall theory which veers away from universalistic



principles. Michael Oakeshott argues that it is not necessary to adhere to certain principles to be classified as a conservative. He claims:

"I do not think it is necessarily connected with any particular beliefs about the universe, about the world in general or about human conduct in general. What it is tied to is certain beliefs about the activity of governing and the instruments of government..."<sup>4</sup>

Yet even within Oakeshott's work we find descriptions of human conduct and appeals to practical knowledge which fall within a tradition of conservative thought about human nature. Other commentators and conservative theorists do not have his reservations. Roger Scruton, in an introductory discussion about conservatism, highlights twelve conceptions of importance to conservative thought<sup>5</sup>.

Whilst conservatives attempt to eschew discussion of human nature in any abstract formal manner their theory does contain an account of the human condition. What is important to identify is its philosophical basis, its position within the overall theory, i.e. is it foundational or involved in the type of circular justificatory role as in Rorty? It is also important to identify the consequences such a theory has for conservative views on morality and for the theory in general. Before discussing the views of contemporary conservatives on this issue, I shall briefly outline a traditional approach by looking at some of Anthony Quinton's arguments in his series of lectures, *The Politics of Imperfection*<sup>6</sup>.

Quinton argues that there are two traditions of thought within conservatism; one religious and one secular. Both stress the imperfection of mankind. This imperfection is moral, often associated with the idea of original sin, and perhaps more importantly, intellectual. We possess finite intellects compared to, for instance, God's intellect. Hence because of this imperfection it is very difficult to

predict how human beings will act. The more they interrelate, the more difficult it will be to understand what is going on, and to formulate social theories governing human beings. Thus, according to the conservative, we should be politically sceptical about anyone who claims to be able to "understand society", and is able to identify purposes or goals which a society is progressing towards. Hence Burke claims, while discussing utopian theorists, that

" In the groves of their academy, at the end of every vista, you see nothing but the gallows."<sup>7</sup>

In a similar manner Oakeshott states that

"their dreams are no different from those of anyone else; and if it is boring to have to listen to dreams of others being recounted, it is insufferable to be forced to re-enact them."<sup>8</sup>

Two other important features of conservatism should now be considered; namely those of traditionalism and organicism. These two principles can be derived from the thesis of human imperfection, both moral and intellectual. If man is viewed as morally imperfect, capable of irrational action, and possessing a limited intellect, then this leads him to be interpreted as a complex organism, beyond complete understanding. Consequently, any group of people living together in a social arrangement will be interpreted in a similar organic manner, where the interrelations between agents will be too complex for accurate predictions. If, due to his moral imperfections, man can only realise his true essence in society, a statement requiring discussion later, and because of its multifarious composition it can never be fully understood by his imperfect intellect, then in order for society to remain stable change should be gradual and reflect the imbued collective wisdom found within society's institutions and customs; its tradition. As Burke states:

"We are afraid to put men to live and trade each on his own private stock of reason, because we suspect that the stock in each man is small and that the individuals would do better to avail themselves of the general bank and capital of nations and ages."<sup>9</sup>

The question can now be asked as to what is the grounds for political action for the conservative. Oakeshott eloquently states:

" In political activity, then, men sail a boundless and bottomless sea; there is neither harbour for shelter nor floor for anchorage, neither starting place nor appointed destination. The enterprise is to keep afloat on an even keel; the sea is both friend and enemy; and the seamanship consists in using the resources of a traditional manner of behaviour in order to make a friend of every hostile occasion."<sup>10</sup>

Thus the function of conservatism in politics is to maintain the stability of society, which, viewed as an organism, is constantly changing. Extra political changes, such as population increases or industrial emergence, must cause the adjustment of political action and institutions to incorporate them. The knowledge required to formulate the policies necessary must be practically based, derived from a tradition of behaviour. There should not be appeals to theories, formulated in abstraction from the traditional arrangements of a particular society.

From this discussion it can be claimed that conservatives view human nature as both morally and intellectually imperfect. This is based not on an elaborate metaphysical argument, but more on empirical observation. Nor was there a method of perfectibility; the best we could hope to achieve was to keep the ship of state afloat by using the imbued wisdom of tradition. However, this lack of a normative or a priori theory of human nature has obvious consequences for the conservative's capacity to make moral statements. If conservative theory cannot stand outside of a particular tradition then it may be difficult to make



either objective moral statements about its own society, or statements about other societies. This potential charge of relativism can be sidestepped if the claim is made that there are no normative theories of ethics. Yet conservatives do wish to defend certain values in society, and also criticise other cultures. To address these questions I shall now focus my attention on the work of two contemporary conservatives, John Casey and Roger Scruton.

Scruton offers the following definition of human nature:

"All political doctrine must be founded in a theory of human nature, and disputes commonly reflect differences over what this nature is... Many conservatives argue as though human nature were entirely inscrutable, revealed by the actual fact of human history, but not easily describable except in terms which are either too platitudinous to found a distinctive doctrine, or too much the product of doctrine to have any universal value... The scepticism of much conservative doctrine exemplifies a similar simplification [as socialism and liberalism], often emphasising the ineffability of human things only in order to dignify its own reluctance to remedy them."<sup>11</sup>

This quote summarizes much of Scruton's approach to conservatism. He wishes to make use of a theory of human nature to ground philosophically his political views on the defence of certain forms of socio\political arrangements. Yet not only does he wish to defend British culture, he also wants to make value judgements on other nations and cultures<sup>12</sup>. And his method for achieving this owes a great deal to Hegel, and to the work of the later Wittgenstein.

In order to analyse Scruton's work on human nature I shall begin by examining his definition of the concept of the person.

Scruton's description of man begins with an attack on the



Cartesian theory of consciousness, making use in his attack of the work of Wittgenstein on the philosophy of mind and language. Human beings are animals, but they are also persons, a classificatory term that is not dependant on animal peculiarities; the term person coming from Roman law identifying the subject in terms of rights and liabilities. One way of offering such a delineation can be formulated in terms of reason. This is not as clear cut a distinction as it may first appear. As Scruton argues, rationality can only fully be understood through thought feeling and action. Hence the difference between a man and a dog is that a dog, while it may possess beliefs, does not form and amend them through reason as a man does. A man may repress his desires in line with a conception of the good; a dog cannot.

How is this difference to be explained? One way is to look at the existence of language; that man is able to store information about the world and retrieve it in a symbolic form, in a way that other animals cannot do. Language is important in expressing mental content, and language is social. Scruton agrees with Wittgenstein that a private language is impossible and hence the language in terms of which we identify the contents of our mind is essentially social. However, Scruton is more concerned with less obvious expressions. He states:

"It is my belief that rationality cannot be conceived as a simple addition to the mental life of an animal, which leaves the remainder of the life unaltered. On the contrary, rationality is, so to speak, a condition of existence, which informs the entire content of the subjects mentality...our mental life is through and through different from the mental life of animals....it is only a rational being that can suffer the pangs of an irrational sentiment: nothing within the mental repertoire of an animal can rise to such a dignity."<sup>13</sup>

Because of the necessary social dimension to language, including the language of inner states, the Cartesian proposition that what I essentially am is revealed to me but not to you is illusory. There is no private inner core to my mind which "I" alone can understand. "I" is a grammatical term, used to communicate the first person perspective from a third person point of view. An ability other animals do not have. It does not describe or identify some metaphysical essence. As Scruton states:

"I consider the first-person perspective as a publicly recognisable and socially generated property of language-using creatures, the moral and metaphysical meaning of which is contained not in some exclusively "subjective" realm, but in the overt reality of linguistic practice."<sup>14</sup>

This quote is not as clear as it initially appears. In the first part Scruton appears to be taking a hard line Wittgensteinian position. Namely that all first person statements are expressions of a public language, for example that pride is not just a description, but that it must have publicly expressible criteria. However, in the second part of the quote he alludes to the point that part of the first person perspective is subjective, while part is in linguistic practice. In the light of this difficulty I now wish to discuss Wittgenstein's discussion of private language and sensations, and how Scruton makes use of these ideas in his conception of human nature.

Wittgenstein wishes to claim that a private language, i.e. one that can only be understood by the speaker, is not only unintelligible to other people but also to the private practitioner. Wittgenstein justifies this assertion by imagining what it would be like to have a private sensation. The person experiencing it concentrates on the sensation and labels it "S". A diary is kept recording each occurrence of "S". Wittgenstein denies that such a private ostensive definition is possible. He states:

"But in the present case I have no criterion of correctness. One would like to say: whatever is going to seem right to me is right. And that only means here we can't talk about 'right'." <sup>15</sup>

It could be questioned whether this problem is one related to the memory; that his memory is fallible. Wittgenstein refutes this by arguing that we cannot establish whether or not the person's memory is at fault because no criteria to assess this proposition have been established.

What Wittgenstein is arguing is that there can be no coherent conception of a private rule, because any standard involving correctness must be independently verifiable. He develops this argument by stating that there cannot be a private ostensive definition as there are no mental analogies corresponding to the essential features of public ostensive definitions. <sup>16</sup> Sensations in a public language are defined in terms of behavioural criteria. The private sensation "S" lacks such criteria of identity. To say *This is "S"* does not tell me what "S" is. He cannot identify it by the act of concentration, because it has not been established what he is concentrating on. He lacks the appropriate sortal term from a public language game. Nor is the dilemma eased if he records his sensations in a table. This is not like calling up a verification index, as it is not an independent standard. In the case of the memory table all I am confirming is my own memory sample. Hence the memory of the meaning of "S" is being used to confirm itself. There is no independent way of testing correctness. It is "as if someone were to buy several copies of the same morning paper to assure himself that what it said was true". <sup>17</sup>

Wittgenstein reinforces his view on the impossibility of a private ostensive definition with the following example. He imagines a situation in which a group of people each had a box which contained a beetle. <sup>18</sup> No one can look into each



others box, and everyone says he knows what a beetle is by looking at the contents of his own box. Each box could contain different things, changing things, or nothing at all. In such a situation, if the word beetle meant anything in the participants language-game, then it would not be as a name of a thing. The thing in the box has no place in the language-game at all. You cannot introduce into a public language-game a word which refers to a private object; the object drops out of consideration as irrelevant.

Wittgenstein's denial of the possibility of private language refutes Descartes approach to consciousness. Descartes wants to achieve knowledge from what it is possible to doubt. We can doubt everything: physical objects, people, our own bodies. What we cannot doubt is our own consciousness. Intention has no logical connection with our own body and the public world; it is entirely contingent. In such a case the language we use to describe our sensations must be private, as all other words are contingent. Thus Wittgenstein rejects the Cartesian approach through his denial of the possibility of a private language.

The opposite position to Descartes' is behaviourism, whereby consciousness is reduced to behaviour, e.g. to be in pain is the same as the action. Wittgenstein does not wish to adopt this position, either. He states:

" 'But you will surely admit that there is a difference between pain-behaviour accompanied by pain and pain-behaviour without any pain?' - Admit it? What greater difference could there be? - 'And yet you again and again reach the conclusion that the sensation itself is a *nothing*' - Not at all. It is not a *something*, but not a *nothing* either!"<sup>19</sup>

Wittgenstein makes use of the criterion argument to counter the claims of behaviourism. This is explained in his discussion of pain.

The word pain is the name of a sensation, but not in the same way as, for example, table is the name of a piece of furniture. One can point at a piece of furniture, but one cannot point at a sensation to identify the word pain. To identify pain as a name of a sensation is to say that behavioural characteristics of pain act as a criteria for a statement such as "X is in pain". We learn the appropriate reaction to pain, with sentences such as "I am in pain", not acting as descriptions but expressions.<sup>20</sup> Hence we do not know that we are in pain, as the negation of this statement is nonsensical. "Introspection provides a privileged, immediate and incorrigible knowledge of our minds."<sup>21</sup> Statements such as "I know that I am in pain" do have a meaning, reinforcing our experiences to the sceptic, e.g. explaining my condition to a doctor.

Wittgenstein's account of the necessity of a public world\form of life in order to be able to refer to inner experiences undermines the idea that private experiences act as a foundation for language and knowledge. Similarly it precludes the necessity of sharing a particular sensation with another person in order to understand the meaning of a psychological term. To understand the meaning of "X is in pain", all we need to possess is the understanding of the concept of pain, as embedded in a public language.

Scruton makes use of Wittgenstein's account of sensations and private language. He describes what he calls the *Rule of Authority*; that whoever says that he is in pain sincerely, and understands the words, is in pain. In order to obey the linguistic rules governing the use of the sentence "I am in pain" we must understand the words in the sentence. "I" has to have authority based on immediate knowledge, not observation, of a whole entity, not just to an inner core which has a separate relation to the body and its behaviour. It is only a human self that can understand

"I" and what it expresses, and it is only the human self that is able to use it as an instrument of communication. It is possible to make mistakes in using words, although this would be very alarming for a word like "I". If I understand the word "pain", and state that I am in pain when I am not, then I can be reproached, not for making a mistake, but for insincerity.

Thus Scruton agrees with Wittgenstein that first and third person perspectives are not separate, but that they are arrived at from different positions. There is certainty in expressing my own pain, and certainty in knowing that you are in pain. There is no subjectivity independent of the public world.

The idea of first-person certainty is also linked to the concept of intention. Intentions too are subject to the Rule of Authority, although in a more complex manner. An insincere intention is one that is not carried out because of a change of heart, weakness of will etc. If I have intentions then I must also be able to reason about the means to obtain my ends; I must possess practical reason. Having the ability to understand ordinary inferences is essential to understanding language. Hence there is a connection between the possession of speech and the possession of rational agency.

"This is but one part of the chain of connection which links intention, rational agency, language, self-consciousness and the first person perspective into a single idea, and which forms the full elaboration of the concept of the person."<sup>22</sup>

Through the formulation of intentions and the acting out of them we can debate with others and change their intentions, enabling us through reason direct access to the core of human activity. We may trust the word of someone declaring an intention, and may feel gratitude, resentment, anger, admiration etc to that person. Similarly I can take such



attitudes towards my own intentions. If I have no intentions about the future then I must possess a similar ambivalent attitude to the past. The past becomes depersonalised if I have no wish to make amends for past actions or take pride in earlier successes. If a man cannot possess attitudes like remorse and pride, then it become difficult to value what he presently possesses.

Thus "person" does not denote a functional nor natural kind. The person enters what Scruton describes as our *Lebenswelt* or surrounding world as the target of interpersonal responses. I am myself, and what I am essentially, I come to believe, is the self that I am. The I is a unitary being; at no point do I have to discover anything about it in order to know it as it is. I am an active being with action springing from me and not just my body. The Cartesian theory of consciousness is attacked for as John Casey claims, "Cartesianism elicits no intimate connection between the self as consciousness and the self as Will."<sup>23</sup>

From the above account it can be inferred that man has a capacity for self-consciousness that is intrinsically different from any mental perception that other animals may possess. However, this self-consciousness will not just develop in isolation, but requires a content linked to a social setting. In justifying his views on the socio-political arrangements necessary for a fully developed self-consciousness, Scruton draws heavily on the work of Hegel as a philosophical foundation. Hegel's account of self-consciousness is different from that of Descartes. For Descartes self-consciousness is given, whereas for Hegel it is achieved through two related processes. Firstly through the interaction and mutual recognition of persons, and secondly through the over-coming of objects and people in the world. The full development of consciousness allows us to mould the world. Hence Hegel stresses the importance of

the labour process. It is to Hegel's work that I now briefly turn.

Hegel wishes to offer a theory of self-knowledge that is not formulated through isolated introspection, but through interaction with other people. "Our minds are led to reflect back upon themselves only after experiencing those around us."<sup>24</sup> Apart from our basic needs, human beings have the capacity to desire objects for the satisfaction of some particular end. However what distinguishes them from other animals is our ability to have second order desires, or desires about desires. We may wish to choose how we satisfy a want, not just take the first option that placates it. This choice is related to a larger perspective than immediate want satisfaction; it relates that satisfaction to other areas of our life, the goals within it, and how we wish to be perceived. Similarly we may suppress\control certain desires, while develop others in line with a certain perception of what are good and bad desires. This implies a desire for recognition that is socially dependant; that we come to be seen as persons worthy of recognition. However, this recognition is not automatic, with each side wanting to be recognised without granting recognition to the other. This results in the struggle for recognition, and the development of the master and slave relationship. However this does not provide an answer to the dilemma, as the master does not receive the recognition of an equal, but of a subjugated means to his desires. Indeed, the master becomes dependant on the slave, and far from being a "being for himself", he is in fact a "being for another".

The position of the slave is also altered, except his self-awareness is enhanced through labour. Through labour he can conquer his fear of death and develop a sense of his own worth. The slave transforms and humanizes nature, while "his labour educates him beyond the level of instinctual



immediacy and prepares him for a life of citizenship as a possessor of rights."<sup>25</sup> Thus to achieve self-consciousness it requires a recognition of the equal worth of another person. The full development of autonomy is therefore social, made possible through civil society and the morality of custom. It is fully realised in the ethical life.

Thus for Scruton and Hegel self-consciousness is an achievement, acquired through time. It is dependent on the interaction of the agent with the world out there, both objects and other people. The ability to speak and express sensations is dependent on a social language-game. This approach differs from Kant, and those liberals inspired by his work. They argue that self-consciousness is not something that needs to be achieved, but is given. Indeed, Scruton argues that the starting point for Kant's philosophy is the single premise of self-consciousness.<sup>26</sup> Hence the social setting is not constitutive of the formulation of consciousness, but an opportunity for consciousness to operate. Hence there is a major difference in the significance and role of society between the conservative and the liberal.

Kant argues that the human agent possesses self-consciousness and the ability to act rationally. Human consciousness contains sensory states together with intuitions or concepts which allow us to think or process the sensory information that we receive. Rational deliberation requires the synthesis of both components. Kant argues that freedom is the ability to be governed by reason. In its highest form it is an action that is chosen for its own sake, as an end in itself. The ability to be motivated by reason alone is termed the *autonomy of the will*, and it contrasts with the *heteronomy of the will*, when an agent is subject to external causes. Hence Kantian ethics involve the rational formulation of the categorical

imperative; a moral law that is an end in itself and applicable to all rational beings. The Kantian position has consequences for politics. The state is of less significance than in conservative thought, being interpreted as essentially neutral; a mere set of governing rules. It is not constitutive in the building of self-consciousness. What is important is that man is allowed to be free i.e. that he can live in accordance with the autonomy of the will. Scruton attacks this position. He claims that a human agent, outside the "empirical conditions" of living in a real social arrangement lacks the capacity to act here and now. If I am to act then my motives must be part of my circumstances and history, "and remain unresponsive to the voice of reason, which calls always from beyond the horizon of my present condition."<sup>27</sup>

Scruton has a more vitriolic attack directed specifically at Kantian influenced liberalism. He claims:

"that it [Liberalism] reposes all politics and all morality in an idea of freedom while providing no philosophy of human nature which will tell us what freedom really is. It isolates man from history, from culture, from all those unchosen aspects of himself which are in fact the preconditions of his subsequent autonomy."<sup>28</sup>

Liberalism offers an inadequate picture of the self with freedom being based around the ability to satisfy desires. Choice extends beyond simple want satisfaction to "choosing" one's institutions as a method of conferring legitimacy. This project is flawed because of the inadequate conception of human nature that the liberal possesses. As Scruton states:

"The conservative, like the radical, recognises that civil order reflects not the desires of man, but the self of man."<sup>29</sup>

Human nature is a social artefact; when we enter into the world we are already affected by what has gone before, on

how we have developed our particular level of consciousness.

In the following sections of the Chapter I will examine the importance of the roll of property and labour in Scruton's work, before going on to examine the consequences this account of human nature has for conservative moral philosophy.

Hegel wishes to invoke self-knowledge as a way to ground his theory of rights. Self-knowledge is crucial in itself, and for a basis of all other knowledge. Within the modern state, where the development of personhood takes place, Hegel argues strongly for the right to property. He states:

A person has the right to place his will in any thing....everyone has the right to make his will a thing or to make the thing his will, or, in other words, to supersede the thing and transform it into his own."<sup>30</sup>

From the earlier discussion of the *Master and Slave* dialectic it was argued that Hegel believed that property was not just instrumental in the attainment of material ends, but that it has a moral quality. It is intrinsic to self-realisation and the development of personality. Consequently he wishes to justify the existence of the institution of private property rights, but does not state what they should be. Like Locke, Hegel argues that these rights should be pre-political, although he does not share Locke's picture of the pre-political state of nature. He also wishes to place far more importance on labour and property than does Locke. Locke offers a theory of property rights based on mixing labour with an object. Provided that I have not taken too much of a particular object, that there is enough left for others, and that I do not waste the object, but add value to it, then the object is mine.<sup>31</sup> However, there is no suggestion that the labour mixing



process has any intrinsic significance to the labourer.

Hegel claimed that bodily activity and labour are not the same. It is only a rational being that is capable of labour, since the intention of labour is to produce value. This is a key motivating factor, as labour is necessary for a rational being to realise his true essence. The motivating content of this intention is only present when an agent can imagine that the object he is labouring on can become private property. It is part of the process through which man frees himself from the power of things. "Property must be private for Hegel, since it is an expression of the 'individual' self, and would lose that character if it stood in relation to more than one self."<sup>32</sup> The individuality of an agent is marked out by private property.

Scruton is at one with Hegel on his defence of property. As he states:

"Through property man imbues his world with will, and begins therein to discover himself as a social being."<sup>33</sup>

Ownership is the primary relation through which man and nature come together. Property also helps to reinforce and establish human bonds; as mere objects they can play no part in this process. To discover true self-consciousness, man must see the world in terms of rights, responsibilities and freedom. This is achieved through property, as objects lose their purely functional definition, instead becoming a focus of rights and obligations. Hence there is a close, and defensive, relationship between man and his home as this is his most immediate contact with legally recognised and valued objects. It should also be remembered that while consumption is an important part of property rights, it is not this aspect which reveals its "social essence".

"The important aspect of property is its stable aspect, in which ownership is conceived as permanent or semi-permanent....The true gift is not the thing which is consumed, but the thing which is kept beyond foreseeable consumption."<sup>34</sup>

How do we first come into contact with property? The answer is within the family. The family is the bedrock on which Scruton's state is based. It is within the family that private property accumulates and is shared, not in accordance with a contract, but shared to underpin and reinforce the kinship ideas of a family. The ability to inherit and bequeath property adds to our sense of lineage; we have a link with the past and a contribution to make to the future. Yet the development of our relationship to property is not the only educative function of the family. We learn to respect the authority of our parents, we learn gratitude, and perhaps most importantly we learn the virtue termed by Aquinas as *pietas* - "To render due homage to those to whom we owe it, and specifically to parents, blood-relations, and country."<sup>35</sup> Hence we value non-contractual obligations. These are all values which, according to Scruton, are needed to produce the good member of society; one that can be fully integrated into the state and understand their position within it. And it is this self-consciousness and understanding that helps to counter the radical charge of alienation, caused by the labour process and private property\ownership of the means of production.

Hegel's theory of alienation is part of his account of the progress of spirit or *Geist* towards knowledge and unity with the *Absolute Idea*. The progression of self-consciousness, first apparent in the struggle for recognition between Master and Slave, is part of a process of de-alienation whereby what has been separated and objectified regains unity through self-creation. During this process however, the consciousness is subject to alienation by its activity in the very search for developed

self-consciousness. Estrangement of the self is experienced, together with the estrangement from and objectification of others. The world is seen as devoid of spirit, which is realised only in a transcendent God. Alienation is overcome by the recognition of the immanence of God, via a sacramental religion, and through the uniting and recognition of other people within the state in the form of the ethical life or *Sittlichkeit*.

Marx derives his concept of alienation from Hegel, as does Scruton. There is some similarity in their approaches as both secularise some of the theological basis of Hegel's theory. Both are concerned to explain the sense of alienation man can feel in the world, and the objectification of other people that this brings. However, they differ in the causes of the estrangement and in the remedy required.

Marx argues that man's social essence is undermined when he sees himself and others as objects, as means to an end. The main constituent to this feeling of alienation is the labour process, notably that associated with private property and capitalism. Men are forced to sell their labour to produce objects which have no use value for them, only exchange value. In the actions of ownership and production, man is seen as a means to an end which is not his own. He sees himself as an object, among other objects. The only way to overcome this is the abolition of private property and the transformation of the means of production.<sup>36</sup>

Scruton has some sympathy with Marx's diagnosis of the causes of alienation. However, he returns back to Hegel for the means of overcoming them. For Scruton,

"A man is alienated in his work, and from his work, when he is able to see it only as a means and not as an end."<sup>37</sup>



Within the modern world this situation arises because of two related factors in the methods of production: mechanisation of production and fetishism of commodities. Such methods of production means that the value of an object being produced lies only in its quantity; we do not make true objects, only replicas. This has a relationship on man's desires and activities so that value is subsumed under choice and profligate consumption.

To counter such a situation Scruton does not want radically to alter the means of production as this would be too drastic a step. What is needed is man to rediscover his true position in the world around him; to see himself as something lasting and to become aware again of the "rational" attitude to property that is needed in his self-conscious development. Hence Scruton claims that:

"Alienation is not a condition of society, but the absence of society."<sup>38</sup>

One way this is achieved is through the rediscovery and development of leisure. Leisure so defined is not obsessive work-outs in private health clubs, although it may be a part, but being part of social clubs and sports teams, as well as relating to one's family and other people in a more conscious manner. A man in harmony with his society in this way will imprint this attitude on his work, and see an end to which he is working.

Thus property is of intrinsic importance in the development of self-consciousness, and in the construction of the person. It is only possible to own property if others recognise the right of possession, and it is only possible to give gifts if one has a right of ownership over the object given. Consequently the concept of private property is of supreme importance in creating and justifying the state. It also reinforces the idea of family and gives one

a sense of the relationship between our present situation, what has gone before and what will come after us. We inherit property, we use it and increase its value, and we bequeath it to our children. Hence property contributes to our freedom, as it develops our self-consciousness, and creates the social structure whereby we can live by reason and value, governed by moral laws. This *ethical* way of life challenges the threat of alienation. To counter alienation, man needs to be part of a society with a common culture that he can understand. It is to the question of the importance of common culture, and its relationship to morality, that I now wish to address.

Scruton wishes to formulate a theory to defend the objectivity of morality; that the good can be identified independently of individual preference. He wishes to defend the position that moral obligations are categorical injunctions, indifferent to individual interests. Yet as I mentioned briefly above, he attacked Kant's method of rational formulation of moral imperatives as lacking motivational content. Instead Scruton wishes to return to Aristotle and establish an intrinsic link between morality and happiness.

Scruton defines happiness thus:

"Happiness is a state capable of considerable duration - even a life-time - and indeed, doubtfully said to endure for a moment, or a day, or even a month, unless cut short by accident. In this it is to be distinguished from pleasure. Moreover, unlike pleasure, it does not have an object...Happiness is unlike pleasure in that it involves the judgement that one's circumstances are intrinsically worthwhile; the happy man thinks of himself as possessing something valuable....In happiness what one is is what one thinks it is good to be."<sup>39</sup>

Happiness is achieved through postulating about ends, the sort of life that we want to live. Scruton criticises much of moral thought as only thinking about means to ill-stated



or incomplete ends. He is critical of the negative idea of liberty, as he believes the absence of coercion is too narrow a foundation to base a moral theory. It offers no discussion or picture of virtue or the good man. He is also worried that such a conception of freedom can produce a separateness in society, as such a society would not place value on the idea of shared moral norms. Such an approach allows Scruton to share some philosophical ground with left communitarians; that what is important is autonomy contributing to a life of value. For those on the left it is necessary to have the resources to be able to live such a life. Scruton disagrees with this requirement and also about the nature of virtue. He does agree with the general principle that autonomy requires a social framework within which to make decisions. Hence the correct action does not just require rational deliberation, but practical knowledge. This is acquired through recognising and responding to the good life. It involves attaching value to particular actions, social relationships, and property. i.e. the ability to form second order desires from a fully developed consciousness. Our actions must be viewed from both the first person and third person perspectives. I carry out an action if it reflects the type of person that I want to be. By partaking in a culture I experience a value system in a practical format, and the person I choose to become is described to me by those around me already acting in this way. I assume a role which I value, and which is valued by my society. This is not a choice in a liberal or existentialist manner, devoid of content. The motivational content of the action is intrinsically linked to my intentions together with its social perception. Hence any discussion of morality requires a social setting, within which the person concerned is part of a common culture which they can understand and know how they relate to it. As Scruton states:

"Until the individual finds himself confronted by some social equivalent of his own self-

determination, he finds his desires, emotions and projects dissipating into empty space."<sup>40</sup>

Scruton's defence of common culture is clearly influenced by Wittgenstein's discussion of language games and forms of life. The idea that:

"Words cannot be understood outside of the context of the non-linguistic human activities into which the use of language is interwoven: the words plus their behavioural surroundings make up the language-game."<sup>41</sup>

John Casey argues that the importance of common culture is under attack from those with an individualistic picture of the perfectibility of man. From this perspective the individual is taken to be only "accidentally" related to the society and culture he finds himself situated in. Moral worth is only assigned to those aspects of our life which we choose. Hence as cultural traditions and race fall outside of our choice, their significance is deliberately lessened.<sup>42</sup> The conservative will criticise this view by arguing that the human person is, from birth, encumbered by obligations and a duty to a history and culture which he did not choose. His birth within a family arrangement implies a sense of continuity with the past, present, and the future. The manner in which he is raised, educated and socialised will be dependent on a particular cultural milieu, with a constituent part being moral and legal rules. Scruton analyses four components of a common culture: that one must be an active participant; that some form of initiation is required; that the effect of a common culture is that a person is joined to something greater than his own experience, transforming his world, or *Lebenswelt*, accordingly. Finally

"Membership gives meaning to the world, by offering occasions for action, a right and wrong procedure, and those ready concepts which close the gap between thought and action - concepts of virtue and vice, of sacred and sacrilege, of seemly and unseemly. A common culture impresses the matter of experience with a moral form."<sup>43</sup>

Hence membership of a common culture gives certainty to ones feelings, and helps to educate the emotions into recognised forms of behaviour. e.g. the manner for showing grief when a person has died reinforces the sense of shared loss within a community.

It is from the institutions and customs of a society that authority is forthcoming. Not an authority that is chosen but one that is acknowledged as a constituent part of membership. It is this form of authority that the liberal wishes to reject. For the conservative, as Scruton argues:

"Without authority there is not will but appetite, not individuality but a herd-like conformity, not freedom but an aimless pursuit of alternatives, none of which has value to the person whose energy is squandered in obtaining it."<sup>44</sup>

Scruton also defends the Hegelian view that within a community one is able to transcend obsessive self-interest, instead realizing the potential of a person who sees one's place in a historical setting belonging to a community whose essence or spirit is more than just the sum of its members.

As was mentioned above the idea of a common culture can come under attack from those who believe that man has the potential for full self-consciousness without the need of a particular social setting. A contemporary example of such an individualistic attack is the attempt to "de-gender" language. Language is viewed as one of the key components of membership of a common culture. Yet, echoing Wittgenstein, "the structures of languages are unchosen outcomes of a myriad individual decisions."<sup>45</sup> Apart from questioning the validity of the philosophical and empirical grounds of the supposed link between masculine nouns/pronouns and the repression of the rights of women, Scruton argues that there would be a direct effect on our culture. Our past literature would at once become no longer



an acceptable intellectual heritage, instead becoming ridiculed and degraded, or as absurd "as the Roman toga or the Morris dance". The result of such an action would be "a massive deculturation as we cease to hear the language of the Shakespeare and the King James Bible as addressed directly to the modern ear."<sup>46</sup>

Scruton believes that from his account of the objectivity of morals he can claim that there will be certain key values that all persons will seek to allude to.

"Just as there are only some things that a man can rationally fear, so there are only some things that a man can rationally value."<sup>47</sup>

The development of consciousness will lead to an examination of human fulfilment and happiness, achieved through second order desires and values, which are socially dependant, and this will lead to the possibility of a morality open to all rational beings within the common culture. Such an approach to morality does not offer a system of thought to prescribe correct behaviour; only the man equipped with practical knowledge has this ability. However, it does give a person a motivational content to their morality, the key factor missing from the Kantian Categorical Imperative.

Once again Scruton is making use of Wittgenstein's view on the logical impossibility of private language. In order to value something rationally we must be able publicly to justify the reasons for our want. Simply to want something is irrational; to give a further reason or what Anscombe calls a "desirability- characterization"<sup>48</sup> makes it a rational desire. The justifying criteria are publicly determined from our social forms of life. Our appeal is to criteria that others recognise and accept:

"Just as, according to Wittgenstein, the meaningful use of language presupposes agreement in judgements, so also meaningful action, and the



existence of public concepts for evaluating it, presupposes agreement in wants."<sup>49</sup>

The use of criteria is not the same as that used to justify non-moral concepts. The good action cannot be justified as possessing x number of criteria; Scruton does not support naturalism. Instead they must be answers to a possible succession of "Why?" questions. Eventually answers may come to an end. If the questioner still does not agree with the answer given as to why the action was taken he may be irrational, or he may not understand the nature of the language-game.<sup>50</sup> However, at no point can the answer be given "This is what I do!", as the objectivity, or what Scruton terms the *indefinitely suspended subjectivity*, of moral beliefs would be lost.<sup>51</sup>

This approach to morality provides a further critique of the arguments for negative liberty found in liberalism. If one holds a moral attitude then not only do you believe certain things, but you also want and intend certain things. Moral attitudes must be universal in their application and must override prudence and self-interest. There is also a demand for normativity. Moral attitudes induce a desire for conformity to those attitudes among other people. If I believe X to be the right action then I must want other people to recognise it and perform it as well. This is a weakness in liberal moral philosophy, as there are no demands for moral normativity among autonomous agents.<sup>52</sup>

The above stance taken by Scruton on morality may leave him open to the claim that he is a moral relativist. And indeed some of his statements on the subject may give credence to the claim. In his Dictionary of Political Thought he defines relativism thus:

"The view that ideals and values do not have

universal validity, but are valid only in relation to particular social and historical conditions. Moral relativism is to be distinguished from moral subjectivism, which says that no moral judgements have any validity whatsoever, beyond the fact of recording someone's subjective conviction. The relativist might think that moral judgements are objective while denying that they are universal."<sup>53</sup>

More emphatically he makes the claim in the Meaning of Conservatism:

"no conservative will be happy to see the spread of relativism, since people need values and have them only to the extent that they believe in their authority. It is a philosophical question whether relativism is true. Politically speaking, however, it is better that few men believe it. Like Plato, a conservative may have to advocate the "Noble Lie". He might in all conscience seek to propagate the ideology which sustains the social order, whether or not there is a reality that correspond to it. For even if there is no reality, the politician can in any case do no better than provide new myths for old."<sup>54</sup>

This second quote does appear problematical for Scruton. The truth in relativism as a philosophical doctrine has been called into question; that for relativism to be true, the doctrine must, by definition be false, and vice versa<sup>55</sup>. Is Scruton then making an empirical observation; that there exist a number of different methods of living and moral systems. There does seem to be a problem if one wishes to advance the Noble Lie thesis in that how do we actually defend it from people who can view, and in some cases experience, these alternative moral arrangements.

The objectivity in morality that Scruton is defending is far more clearly expounded in the work of John Casey, and it is to this work that I now wish to turn.

Much of Casey's work on ethics is influenced by Wittgenstein's work both on language and aesthetics. He

supports the anti-Cartesian position of Wittgenstein, defending the necessity of the public expression of sensations and the social setting of language games<sup>56</sup>, together with public practice for successful rule following<sup>57</sup>. Casey also criticises the supposed distinction between the so called "rational" (scientific) methods of arguing, and those less rigorous or empirically verifiable methods often associated with ethics and aesthetics. He argues that there is no clear distinction/hierarchy between the approaches and that quite often theories are accepted through persuasion and the fact that some theories have a "charm" to the believer<sup>58</sup>. Rather than trying to attack the rationality of different arguments, we should instead view them as different language games whose manner of logical argument is internal to the particular language game.

Casey attacks the view that aesthetics is about personal choice or taste. Following on from Wittgenstein he argues that aesthetics is about ends; that we do not just choose our responses to a work of art, but compare it to other works of art. We are persuaded of the reasons why a piece of art is good/bad. If we do not accept these public criteria then it can be claimed that we are acting irrationally. To describe a picture does not give evaluative judgements. Its meaning is "not on its face", but requires a public interpretation. Hence there is an internal evaluative relationship between works of art, but there is also a wider social setting which gives the criteria for what resembles a piece of art, e.g. a pile of bricks in the road is not a piece of art, in a gallery it is<sup>59</sup>.

Casey relates these aesthetic arguments to ethics. In a similar manner to Scruton, he argues that moral values require public criteria. They are not rational abstractions but require social agreement as a method of verification. They too are about ends, not personal choices, and that



ends can be agreed on by rational debate/persuasion. Nor can moral norms be arrived at through a description of man or his physical characteristics, i.e. naturalism. These properties may contribute, but they require a social setting. Hence Casey defends an absolutist approach to ethics as opposed to a consequentialist theory. He agrees with Wittgenstein that if this leads in some instances to moral dilemmas then this is because sometimes moral dilemmas do occur. It does not invalidate moral absolutism or provide a case to claim that consequentialism is more rational. They should be viewed as different language games with different logical structures<sup>60</sup>.

The starting point for Casey's defence of moral virtues is very similar to the position that Scruton took on consciousness, rationality, intention and the first person perspective. For Casey if I have the ability to form intentions based on desires, then this will lead to emotions, eg frustration, disappointment. This in turn will lead to the possibility of fear, something all rational beings must have in the very nature of their intention. I will also be able to feel hatred and anger, and my conception of the past will lead to ideas of regret, remorse and guilt. Therefore a whole range of moral concepts will be open to me. If I give up my intentions then I will be described by the vices such as cowardice and weakness of will; if I follow them through then I will be said to have the important virtue of courage.

The question Casey now raises is how are the virtues part of rationality? He answers this by using the work of Aquinas. He claims that nearly all of the virtues relate to various human passions, and that with certain passions there is a rational and an irrational way of experiencing them. A rational creature does not therefore merely regard his own ends as objects of rational choice, but can also aim at cultivating certain dispositions; eg he can act



courageously rather than cowardly. An agent's aim will be to bring his own emotions within the bounds of such rational decisions. As Casey states:

"Unless he to some extent aims at the cultivation of certain dispositions it is difficult to see how he can ascribe to him the kind of fullness of intention that is characteristic of a rational being."<sup>61</sup>

Hence Casey believes that it is possible to transcend Moore's Naturalistic Fallacy, and that from fact we can arrive at value. The rational man has a reason for cultivating certain sorts of disposition rather than others; it is difficult to imagine how a man could value vices more highly than virtues. eg someone who is a coward lacks perseverance, confidence etc in not persisting in a course of action. Casey appears to believe that he can counter the difficulties of moving from "is" to "ought" by introducing the bridge notion of a "role". For Casey a role is viewed as pre-moral, in that it comes with responsibilities and duties, or what Casey calls "criteria of relevance"<sup>62</sup>. Yet we choose which roles we wish to take on against a social setting whereby different roles are accorded different moral values. I choose to become X because X is valued in my society. So just as a good e.g. knife must possess a blade, be sharp, well balanced etc, so a good man must possess the virtues of courage etc. The virtues are a criteria of goodness. However, this does not really solve Casey's problem, only alter it. The question now becomes one of choice over the standards from which to derive the moral imperative. This decision is dependant on a specific philosophical\political position.

In his book Pagan Virtue, Casey makes a more detailed defence of a virtue based theory of ethics. He claims that we are subject to a number of competing moral schemes, and that these cannot necessarily be logically reconciled, and may indeed be incommensurate. He also wishes to claim that

the ideas of moral equality which can be found in the theories of Christianity/Kant are not a priori more important than the "Pagan Virtues" of Aristotle. Casey identifies certain virtues, courage, temperance, practical wisdom, justice, which he justifies as being necessary for the good man to exhibit. However, following Aristotle, he argues that whilst it is good to possess these virtues they should be expressed in their highest form; this requires that they be acted upon "magnificently"; that gestures should be grand and to a degree flamboyant. Yet one should always be benevolent and just when dealing with other people. Hence to live in accordance with the virtues is dependant on contingent situations: on my physical appearance; my upbringing; my physical and mental abilities; my financial and social status. Therefore moral virtue cannot be shared equally by all people.

Casey claims that such a stance obviously comes into conflict with the moral positions of Christianity and Kant. Both these philosophies stress, albeit from different philosophical justifications, the real possibility of moral equality. Casey defends his position by stating that it is difficult to imagine a man who could be described as good who did not exhibit the above virtues. Also, it is often empirically the case that those people who exhibit the virtues in a magnificent fashion do enjoy more respect, praise and loyalty than those who live in accordance with the virtues, but whose method of display is far less obvious or flamboyant. Hence we are often drawn to success, pride, and worldliness; values at odds with Christianity and the Kantian tradition. Yet Casey acknowledges the importance that these other traditions play in our life and culture; that we do believe in at least the possibility of equal moral worth. He wishes to claim that we live in a confused moral environment, but that if we honestly question what in morality we admire then it would be "Pagan Virtues". This we only hesitantly admit because of the

influence of the Christian/Kantian tradition. And because of this influence of other moral traditions in our culture, he does not wish to argue for a "thorough" return to Pagan Virtue.

Casey's discussion of Pagan Virtues raises a number of interesting issues. One area that I have only alluded to in this chapter, as I wish to examine it later in the thesis, is religion. It is perhaps worth mentioning that Casey here assigns religion to one strand in our moral inheritance. It is useful, but not as important as the virtues. For Scruton it is useful for propagating myths to the masses, as well as the style of ceremony being important part of identifying the distinctiveness of the community. Its "truth" is almost irrelevant. This could provide a possible tension with a Hegelian inspired view of religion, with its stress on finding the truth of the meaning of Christianity as opposed to becoming obsessed with the narrative aspect.

Casey's defence of a moral aristocracy is consistent with those theorists who wish to attack the liberal/Kantian universalistic position. He discusses the difficulty of realizing oneself in a modern bureaucratised state as opposed to one ordered along the lines of virtue. However this stance is a little confusing in the light of Casey's defence of the Hegelian state, which Hegel wishes to see as bureaucratised and formal. What Casey is perhaps alluding to is a state which is pictured as having a life of its own, rather than a state which is viewed as a provider of wants and needs, based on rights rather than pietas.

In his discussion of temperance Casey wishes to establish a dichotomy between the public and the private. That temperance should apply to the private sphere, but not necessarily to the public. Yet it can be questioned whether or not such a division is either desirable or even possible. Are our actions in the public sphere realizations



of our human nature, or are they acting out a role? Alternatively, is the private sphere where we act in accordance with our essence, or is this where we also act out a role. It is not clear whether or not Casey is arguing that man needs an active expression of his essence which is only possible in the public sphere. In addition, if we are to make such a public\private dichotomy, then it does seem that this must have an effect on our relationship with women. They must be perceived as something to be treated differently, perhaps reinforcing the idea of a moral hierarchy and the subjugation of women. It is also likely that such an attitude could spill over into the public world, creating a view of women as unequal.

Casey's use of the term tradition in Pagan Virtue is confusing. If we wish to analyze tradition, and identify separate strands, then we lose some essential point of it. If we say that there are traditions acting upon us, then this raises the problem of which tradition to choose from when seeking the practical knowledge required in human flourishing. As soon as we bring in the notion of choice then we allude to the concept of autonomy, which is a problem for the conservative as this leads us to retreat to the Kantian\liberal notion of the "person". Casey lacks the metaphysical analysis of Hegel in knowing the right tradition at work in society.

Both Scruton and Casey wish to argue that from a priori claims about human nature and rationality we can deduce moral virtues, whose practical realization is made real to us in its social forms and roles. However, this approach must prove difficult if they want to make generalist claims while defending "from attack" their own culture. Are they making the claim that British culture has achieved the status of ethical life. If so then how do they philosophically justify this and reject the calls for



change? It is to these problems that I shall now address in my concluding section.

Before directly addressing some of these issues I wish to examine some of the problems that conservatives face who use Wittgenstein's ideas on language and epistemology as a philosophical justification for their work.

Wittgenstein makes the claim that "In the beginning was the deed"<sup>63</sup> i.e. the commitment. That first we are committed to our value system rather than understand it<sup>64</sup>. His defence of a social justification for meaning in language and as a bedrock for epistemology has instant appeal for the conservative. If meaning is community based then it would seem likely that change should be slow, that there should be bedrock values, and that society should be homogeneous. We should also act within a tradition making use of habit<sup>65</sup>. His work can also be used to challenge those wanting to de-gender language:

"For without these rules the word has yet no meaning; and if we change the rules, it now has another meaning (or none), and in that case we may just as well change the word too."<sup>66</sup>

However there are difficulties. If according to Wittgenstein meaning is dependant on the social situation or form of life, then this has two consequences. Firstly, if meaning is relative to the social situation, then so is truth which could lead to the claim of relativism. And secondly, if society composes of different language games, then this could be seen as leading to a fragmented society. A common culture could be based around a truth that we are all aspiring towards, e.g. as in the work of Hegel. However this is not an answer to the problem for writers such as Scruton and Casey as they lack such a teleological stance. Also, Wittgenstein informs us that within the multiplicity of language games, some become obsolete, while new ones get

created. For the conservative this has to be problematical, as there are certain values in society which they wish to remain constant.

A further tension for those conservatives who wish to use Wittgenstein's later work is where he alludes to the "natural history of human beings". He states that "Commanding, questioning, recounting, chatting are as much a part of our natural history as walking, eating, drinking, playing,"<sup>67</sup> and that within his work

"What we are supplying are really remarks on the natural history of human beings; we are not contributing curiosities however, but observations which no one has doubted, but which have escaped remark only because they are always before our eyes."<sup>68</sup>

These claims about the natural history of mankind do appear to be very general statements about certain physical and epistemological potentialities of human beings, e.g. that we point when we want to show things, that we must share public norms in order to understand one another. We cannot speak about such claims or make meta-theories as they are pre-language games, and that it is impossible to discuss issues which are not grounded in a public practice.

J S Nyiri uses these ideas to make a much stronger claim. He states:

"But there is a human nature, since it is an unalterable anthropological fact - a fact that is, indeed, a precondition for the existence of logic - that any human being must, in order to be a human being, be constrained by some form of life, by some network of tradition."<sup>69</sup>

There are difficulties with his position. To begin with he does appear to be constructing a meta-language of explanation; precisely what Wittgenstein is against. He argues that Wittgenstein was influenced by, and an influence on, members of the German neo-conservative school during the 1920's and 1930's. Indeed, Wittgenstein's work provided a theoretical, if not a practical, solution to the

dilemma that the School faced. Namely, they believed in the necessity of absolute standards in society, yet they lived in a world that no longer possessed them. Nyiri claims that Wittgenstein's ideas on the public nature of meaning and rule-following, together with his belief in the importance of bedrock values, gave theoretical support to their views.<sup>70</sup> Yet this contradicts Wittgenstein's ideas about trying to explain beyond language games, instead of describing what is going on. As was discussed above, language games become obsolete. It is not the task of the philosopher to try and resurrect them. Furthermore, it is not clear from his claim that he can defend Wittgenstein's relationship to conservatism. Nyiri's claim about the value and influence of tradition is general enough to be challenged by few people except by those theorists who view man as having a complete set of internal values that society then facilitates. His claim about tradition has very few political consequences. A development of the argument needs to be made and public criteria identified. The generality of Wittgenstein's claim on those values/properties associated with the natural history argument are similar to e.g. theories of human needs. We may be able to agree that there are universal human needs, but how to implement them and what they actually mean produce varying responses that are culturally dependant.

Wittgenstein does appear to want to argue that there are some very general common features to be found among human beings. Yet this argument must be fused with his views on "bedrock" values to be found within *On Certainty*. That these common values can only be viewed and described against a cultural background or family form. This interpretation is similar to that found in Hegel and Scruton when discussing the importance of property in human development, and in Casey and Scruton when they discuss virtue ethics and morality.



Wittgenstein's work, especially the idea of family resemblance, can be used to examine the idea of common culture. However, using such an analysis it can be questioned whether there is something common to all members within the culture. Within a family resemblance scheme there are a number of elements within the spectrum of shared components. Yet there is no one element common to each combination within the resemblances. Some cultures may be closed whereas others may be open. The important point is that we cannot decide in advance which will be which; we cannot say that common cultures\communities will be closed as Scruton often wants to claim. Wittgenstein says that the philosopher should not decide in advance or a priori about language games, but should look and see<sup>71</sup>.

Wittgenstein's work on private language, language games and family resemblances can be used to attack various forms of liberalism. A case may also be offered, as Nyiri does, to use his work to support a form of Oakeshottian conservatism. Such a definition of conservatism would be based around a homogeneous society of shared moral ideas and prevailing culture. Change would be gradual and in line with a tradition of behaviour. In such a society there would be little challenge to the bedrock ideas underpinning society. Whilst certain values may be tacitly acknowledged as fundamental, there would be no explicit statement of this. Tradition and culture would be interpreted as a family resemblance moving through history. However, it does appear that it is far more difficult to make use of his work as a cogent bedrock to the forms of rigid foundational conservatism that Scruton and Casey are advocating<sup>72</sup>. In addition, if Scruton is identifying what he sees as a challenge to British culture, it does not appear that Wittgenstein's work can be used to counter this. There is evidence to suggest that Wittgenstein was critical of Western society in the 1920's and 1930's<sup>73</sup>, but was unable to offer a solution about what to do.<sup>74</sup>



Throughout this chapter the importance of Hegel has been stressed within the work of the theorists I have been examining. Yet while it obviously inspires Scruton it can in no way be said that his theories have the philosophical tightness of Hegel. Hegel believes in the march of history as God given; that the development of society and self-consciousness is the work of God. He offers a framework for human nature, with a metaphysical justification for property and its importance in the development of self-consciousness. Hence within Hegel there is a right to property. He also has a historical framework for the development of self-consciousness, stressing the importance of God.

Scruton lacks the historical determinism found within Hegel, nor does he place so much importance on God. These differences can produce problems for Scruton's theories. If he does not have a God driven view of history, then how can he defend a particular society. To say that it merely exists is not enough. The answer that can come back "is so lets change it". Hence, as was highlighted above, he is in danger of collapsing into relativism. Scruton's scepticism over religion means that he places less importance on the idea of original sin and human imperfection than those writers identified by Quinton as being within the conservative tradition. Hence within his early writings especially, there is a belief that the problems of society can be analysed, and solutions offered. The political scepticism offered by Quinton as one of the main principles of conservative thought is not prevalent.

The idea of God and original sin, found especially in Christianity, is of difficulty for much of Scruton's work. The role of God and the established Church, and the tensions that can develop with the state, are discussed later in the thesis. So too are the criticisms derived from

the theory of original sin. According to one Christian approach, sexual desire reflects our fallen nature, as man becomes subject to his animal desires. Scruton refutes this position arguing that only rational beings can experience sexual desire. Despite Scruton's scepticism over the idea of original sin, and man's fallen condition, he does acknowledge that the abandonment of such a position can result in ideas of human perfectibility; that people can postulate on abstract ideas about how the perfect society should be ordered, so as to produce perfect human beings. Such ideas, when put into practice, all too readily produce the institutionalised death camp and the liquidator.<sup>75</sup>

Scruton also does not support the concept of natural rights. He criticises their lack of a basis, reflected in the lack of agreement between those writers who wish to defend such a theory. For rights to have any meaning they must be recognised by all the people affected by them, and they must be enforced by a judicial power. Hence the only rights that exist are those *positive rights*, found within a particular system of law. He states that "a right becomes a political reality only with the power that is able to enforce it. Rights without powers are political fictions."<sup>76</sup> This stance is problematic when it comes to discussing property. If property is so important then does it not almost become a right; we have a need for property to develop. Yet Scruton is against natural rights and their basis on needs. It may be argued that Scruton is arguing for a negative use of the term right rather than positive. But this still does not reconcile his position with his anti-natural rights stance. Scruton does argue that whilst natural rights do not exist, the fiction of their existence does, not just among e.g. liberal theorists, but also among ordinary people. That there are certain values that have to be respected in order for us to live e.g. agreement on justice, respect for law. However, these are not rights, but common sense laws that have become apparent through our

everyday lives - we have learnt that if we treat people justly then they will usually respond in a similar manner. However, this approach would not be applicable to the right of property, as property is required in the very act of self-conscious formulation which precedes the formation of the social arrangement.

Scruton is also against particular types of property, types that lack value and are instantly replaceable. He claims that this can lead to alienation which should be reconciled by developing leisure. This seems a fairly weak prescription. If I am unhappy in my work, which I of course spend the majority of my waking hours performing, then this must have an effect on my perceptions of leisure as well. Within his discussion of work and property there seem to be almost a hankering for a return to a previous age of craftsmen and professions. This problem of commodity fetishism does seem to be endemic of the capitalist mode of production. Coupled to this is Scruton's conception of autonomy based not on choice but value. This would appear to be in direct conflict with the choice associated freedom required in capitalism. Such stances do appear to undercut the existing traditional moral and economic order.

However, perhaps a more charitable reading of Scruton is possible. Whilst capitalism requires us to act as sovereign agents, we do not have to respond to every choice placed before us. Certain items do not figure in our decision making; some because they are too expensive, while others, more importantly, just have no value to us, e.g. I do not choose between different makes of computer games because they have no value to me and hence I have no desire to bring them into my life. Scruton wishes us to value property not purely in a functional sense, but in our ability to value it as a part of one's life. It is not alien to me but a part of me, e.g. a footballer will have



a favourite pair of boots repaired, or a cook repair a favourite saucepan. Such a reading does come into conflict with a form of unbridled capitalism, but does allow for the variety of choice that the free market offers as opposed to planned economies.

Scruton wishes to defend tradition and culture, while at the same time criticise other political systems. The interesting question is what methods are available to him for attacking e.g. communist/collective political systems. He can use an historical method claiming that is not in line with the tradition of society. However, this may be inadequate, e.g. the case of Russia/Soviet Union. Yet even if a case can be argued then it can be subject to critical analysis and debate about scholarly methods and interpretation. This is not a satisfactory answer to the problem. The only answer would appear to be an appeal to theoretical\metaphysical notions of human nature, i.e. Hegel\virtues. Let us consider the former Soviet Union. It was quite possible for several generations of people to grow up and act within the tradition of the Soviet system. How then could they be criticised. One answer is an appeal to the virtues. However they may be virtuous. A second appeal might then be made to the Hegelian conception of the importance of private property. Hence whilst Scruton wishes to defend tradition against abstract formalizing, he would need to make use of it to defend a particular political position. -

There are further difficulties as well within Scruton's discussion of relativism. In one definition he wishes to analyze three separate types of relativism: moral, cultural, and epistemological<sup>77</sup>. Yet it may be questioned whether such a distinction exists; he offers no border definition. The question can be asked whether it is possible to split the moral from the cultural, or the epistemological from the moral.



It is also necessary to return to the charge against conservatism of being a relativist theory. Berry thinks that conservatism can counter the charge of relativism. He states:

Whilst conservatives do generally eschew criticism of other regimes\cultures, this does not prevent them from deprecating regimes that flout standards of human decency in general, and effective family life in particular."<sup>78</sup>

This seems a fairly weak prescription. Phrases such as "standards of human decency", and "effective family life" do leave themselves open to debate and interpretation. They must also have a large cultural imprint, so that their true meanings can only be understood from within a particular culture. As was argued earlier, cultural understanding cannot be taught but only imparted to the participators. Hence such a defence against relativism does appear to be at odds with other tenants of conservative doctrine.

Scruton, and Casey, are against theories of morality formulated in abstraction, with rules to govern action. They lack a social content, and deny an input by the agent in choosing to act in a particular way; in recognising the type of person that he wants to be. One cannot a priori know the right action to take. It requires practical knowledge. If this is the position adopted then Scruton and Casey are relativists. However, if the above account of a theoretical morality is excluded then, then the charge of relativism, if not defeated, is altered. They could agree on a set of objective values, while at the same time denying a universalistic approach to their practical implementation. From a definition of human nature it could be argued for the importance of society and for the virtues contained within. The way that they are expressed will be socially dependant. Whilst we might not recognise particular actions in another society as virtuous, these could be explained to us by a member of the culture.

However this use of virtue ethics can also be problematic.

The question can be asked which virtues should one possess. According to Aristotle to be a good X find one and display the characteristics. The problem is what about the good concentration camp guard who displays virtues in killing people. Can we morally criticise this. Possibly if we take the view that roles and consequences are not morally neutral, but must be seen in the context of a particular culture. The response to that can be what about a culture with a tradition of racism; one could still be a good concentration camp guard<sup>79</sup>. It is not clear how we can make a statement about this. Hegel can get around this by using the moral values within Christianity. Scruton, and Casey, do not possess this defence. All they could do is appeal to the concept of justice, which they see as a virtue; that all men should be treated in a just manner. Yet this appears to be a weak prescription as justice will require a social setting for action and interpretation.

There is a further point with regards to virtues that should be highlighted. If morality is to be based on happiness, is it possible to rationally formulate what constitutes it. Are there a distinct set of values, the virtues, or should it be viewed more as a family form, with perhaps no one value being common to all arrangements. It may also be questioned whether or not it is possible to disregard certain, e.g. physical pleasures that may only be short term, but may contribute to happiness.

Throughout the above discussion I have been stressing the importance of a common culture as opposed to the liberal idea which views society as more of a collection of individuals, lessening the importance of the collective whole. However, such a conception of the importance of cultural homogeneity can come under attack from conservative writers as well. John Gray describes the above

view as a "modern heresy". He cites Scruton claiming that his approach stressing that the values of moral communities should be reflected and defended by political institutions displays a remoteness from historical reality. Gray does not deny the importance of the social arrangement in defining our identity. Indeed he attacks those theorists, e.g. marxians, who wish to deny this and reveal an essential human nature. Yet Gray argues that we are not dependant on membership of one community, but are defined by our attachment to many. Such attachment is often transitional; we belong to no one group and can switch and amend allegiances. Such an approach as Scruton's corrupts the nature of government, so that institutions and state power become involved in problems which they cannot hope to solve. Instead government should limit its activities to preserving the type of order that has developed within the society, and leave individuals and groups to sort out their own problems. As Gray states, the approach taken by theorists who stress common culture is:

"a chimera produced by a mistaken theory which understands political order in a quasi-naturalistic fashion as an expression of pre-existent community, when it is properly understood as a matter of strictly political allegiance to the artefact of sovereign authority."<sup>80</sup>

Gray argues that we should accept the contingency of our situation and develop a theory which he terms "post-modern liberal conservatism". This views the state as essentially Hobbesian, concerned with issues of security and authority, united in a form of solidarity between "civilised men and women, practitioners of different traditions, who nevertheless have in common a perception of enmity in regard to the totalitarian states and re-barbarising movements of our time."<sup>81</sup>

Gray's criticism of cultural homogeneity does seem perfectly plausible. British society has traditionally been



composed of different ethnic, religious, social groups etc.. As was discussed earlier, Casey has made the claim that we are subject to a number of moral traditions acting upon us. Scruton's attempt at trying to rationally analyse common culture has left himself open to such an attack as Gray's. As soon as we rationally debate and justify statements or ways of life, then they become subject to criticism and refutation. The term "British" does have some meaning, although it is debatable what that exact meaning is, or even if there are any common components. As was mentioned earlier, it is a much more useful defence to make use of narratives or images to conjure up an essential essence of "Britishness". Scruton, like Gray, does wish to see a limited role for the state, allowing a large sphere of private activity and problem solving. However he does disagree with Gray over the very function of the state and its active role. Perhaps Gray's view of a limited Hobbesian state is as chimerical as Scruton's homogeneous society.

It would appear that the concept of human nature is used as a building block by both Scruton and Casey in developing their theory of society and the state. Man has an active cognitive capacity; he interacts with the world about him and consequently requires a social setting to develop full self-consciousness. His mental, and physical, ability condition his perception of himself, with his moral identity receiving a content in a particular social setting. However, it is not clear how these writers can resist change and defend the importance of British culture, if they lack the metaphysics of Hegel, or wish to stress the value of the epistemology of the later Wittgenstein. If one of Scruton's aims in particular is also to make judgements about other cultures, then it is not clear how he can do this without appealing to theory. The appeal to theory does not resolve his dilemma, but creates two further problems. Firstly, if he makes use of an abstract



construction of man, then he is resembling the approach of the liberal and the marxist; positions that he earlier invalidates. And secondly, if we rationally formulate those moral values required for the good life, then this leaves them open to debate, and their value subject to varying interpretations. To defend values thought of as intrinsic to a society, it is much better not to discuss and justify them rationally, but to use them in a narrative style conjuring images of a particular way of life. In his discussion of relativism, Scruton acknowledges the importance of myth in promoting such values. The approach by Scruton to universalise values does appear to run counter to the accepted conservative practice of accepting moral values not just a priori, but per se.

## NOTES

1. For the sake of convention and proper usage the noun man or men will be used in its generic form representing both the male and female of the species. I hope to make it clear within the text when this is not the case, and it refers just to the male.

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## Chapter Two

### Gender, Sexuality and the Family

In the previous chapters I discussed the conservative approach to the concept of human nature. In particular I stressed the effect rationality has on differentiating us from other animals; that we are able to reason about our desires and formulate long-term plans for obtaining them. This made certain assumptions about first-person certainty. When I speak and act it is in an immediate fashion. There is nothing to be discovered or observed by me about my actions. Hence I do not know my mental states in the same way I know a fact. At the same time my thoughts and intentions are not private. By drawing on the work of Wittgenstein I argued that a "public stage-setting" is required to allow me to verify my thoughts and actions from an outside or third person perspective. Indeed, without such a public world language would not be possible.

From these claims on the philosophy of mind and language, together with the work of Hegel on the Master and Slave dialectic, I argued that through the interaction of human beings we are able to develop our intentions and capabilities beyond simple want satisfactions. Through debating with other people we can raise our level of consciousness, changing and amending our wants, and observing them from a third person perspective. What we want is influenced by the value placed on it by others. Hence I stressed the importance of the social arrangement for the conservative when contemplating intentions and ideas on human flourishing. This method of reasoning has direct influence for ideas of morality. If I have the ability to achieve not just short-term want satisfaction, but also long term goals, then this has consequences for human flourishing. Happiness is related not to the removal of barriers to a desire, but to the achievement of a particular way of life. Similarly, if I am able to debate

and examine my actions and intentions, then the methods in which I live and carry them out can be subject to public scrutiny. Hence my previous discussion of Aristotelian virtue ethics.

I wish to use the above as a bedrock for the analysis of conservative views on gender, sexuality and the family. I will again be using the views of Roger Scruton to provide the philosophical analysis of gender and sexuality, as well as giving an account of the nature of sexual desire. I will then examine the consequences this approach has for morality and the state.

In line with many conservative writers, Scruton wishes to draw upon biological differences between male and female in order to explain gender and role differences in society. Yet at the same time he questions the validity of the analysis of sexual desire from a scientific position. He also questions the ranking found in some commentators work, eg Plato, which places erotic love as a higher achievement than sexual desire, which is far more closely related to our animal instincts. Whilst it obviously cannot be denied that human beings are animals, they are also persons. And it is this aspect for Scruton which imposes itself on all aspects of human sexuality, and differentiates our sexuality from that of all other animals.

Scruton states that the biological differences between men and women are not as great as some may argue. However, they do possess different bodies, and have different physical and mental capacities. They differ in their approaches to solving practical problems.<sup>1</sup> Yet the most obvious difference is in their sexual abilities:

"For women may become pregnant; and their bodies have a rhythm, and a destiny, they are conditioned by the fact of childbirth."<sup>2</sup>



Male and female fetuses develop in different ways which have consequences for their biological characteristics. Although Scruton is sceptical about the usefulness and validity of the sociobiologist's account of sexual union, and their arguments about gene perpetuation, he makes use of this approach in an a priori form to give an account of animal sexuality in humans. In order for the male to further his gene line he should impregnate a number of women, seeking to defend them for his own use, and hence providing them with food and shelter so that his children can grow. The female has an interest in being retiring, so that men will compete for her and she will then mate with the fittest. She will then require the man to provide for her and so will attempt to provide an environment that will entice him to stay. He will be motivated by those factors which encourage child birth, eg youth, health. She too will value physical attributes, but will also place considerable emphasis on security.

While the above method of analysis may offer some insights into human sexual instinct, Scruton states that it is unlikely to provide us with little explanatory power in understanding human sexual relationships. It is limited for two interrelated reasons. Firstly it does not seem to correspond with what is going on around us, and secondly it fails to take account of the ability of humans to become "persons" i.e. to have a conception of their embodiment from both the first and third person perspectives. Sexual desire has a foundation in our biological nature but manifests itself as a social artefact, achieved through the responses between persons. This Scruton terms as an intentional understanding of sexual desire, one "which incorporates not only the distinct observable forms of man and woman, but also the differences in life and behaviour which cause us selectively to respond to them."<sup>3</sup>

The intentional account of sexual desire can be challenged

from a "scientific" or "materialist" analysis found in the work of such people as sociobiologists, eg E O Wilson, or psycho-analysts, eg Freud. They attempt to look beyond the surface of our everyday life or Lebenswelt, and produce theories of what really motivates human beings when they are not distracted by how they live their lives in practice. Scruton allies this approach to the Marxian method in politics which claims to strip away the deluding\ideological surface to reveal the material reality of society.

Sociobiologists seek to explain sexual behaviour as an evolutionary function related to the continuation of the species. This is the key to understanding sexual desire, and whilst social phenomena may be significant they are not central. This approach is subject to attack from a number of areas, not least of which is the fact that there is still much to be learnt about evolutionary method, and why we are pushed in particular directions. Scruton offers three challenges to the sociobiologist. Firstly he claims that whilst our behaviour is genetically determined in a broad sense, such a theory cannot explain the differences in particularities of sexual behaviour. Secondly, in the non-human world most actions can be explained as a result of causes in a scientific theory. In the human world there are many practices which cannot be understood merely by explaining them, as they are themselves a form of understanding. For example we may be able to offer reasons for a particular religious service, but these would not be causes in a deterministic sense. The reasons would be related to the religion, which itself is a method of understanding human existence. To talk of cause as the sociobiologist wants to would be inappropriate with this social phenomena.

The final criticism relates directly to Scruton's work on human nature. Human beings and non-humans are

differentiated by rationality. There is a vast difference between the formulated cooperation between humans, and the instinctive cooperation between animals. Rationality allows us to debate and formulate social arrangements in a manner that is far more diverse and complex than could be argued as being part of any "species inheritance". We have intentional understanding, which is key to understanding and explaining our social behaviour.

If sociobiology should be questioned because of its denial of human intentionality, Freudian psychology should be treated wearily because while it takes account of intentional attitudes it constructs a theory that is more myth than scientific. Scruton claims that Freud's account of sexuality is based on "a metaphor of the human mind", with the mind "structured by forces and barriers". Mental states are "pushed into the unconscious by repression, and retained there by defence; or else they break through, borne up on a crest of libido into the world of action"<sup>4</sup> The mind is divided up between the conscious, ego, and the unconscious, id, both vying with each other for ascendancy. Also present is the super-ego which is both created by and acts as a check on the ego. Such a theory of the mind provides an account of what is happening when we reason, not in a scientific manner, but as a myth; providing stories to explain mysterious processes.

Freud's account has obvious difficulties if we do try to interpret it in a scientific manner. As Scruton states, the picture of various competing components in the mind is very anthropomorphic. It is as if the components themselves have intentions and interests which they are seeking to promote. There is also the difficulty of having unconscious states active in a person's mind. Such an analysis would seem to question ideas about first person certainty and the role of consciousness to mentality. Scruton, following Wittgenstein, claims that the success of Freud's theory is



not in its explanatory aspects, but in its practical application. Wittgenstein claimed that the success of Freudian analysis was due not so much to the success of the cure, but in the patient's acceptance of the interpretation of their behaviour, within which was contained the secret of their cure. It was:

"An entirely new account of a correct explanation. Not one agreeing with experience, but one accepted. You have to give the explanation that is accepted. This is the whole point of the explanation.

If you are led by psycho-analysis to say that really you thought so and so or that really your motive was so and so, this is not a matter of discovery, but of persuasion."<sup>5</sup>

Scruton describes Freud's work as a form of "intentional revisionism", which is more harmful than useful. This is because in stressing the importance of childhood sexuality Freud is breaking the division between adult and child - the idea of innocence. This he sees as a barrier of responsibility which is respected in all other areas of our life. He is also critical of the picture of sexuality as one of almost uncontrollable forces tearing at our very essence, and only tempered by mental barriers which we construct sub-consciously. It presents an account of human sexuality which ends up having some similarities with the sociobiologist, in that human sexuality is related to our physical nature and hence can be viewed as amoral. For Scruton this is unacceptable as it is our ability to create a moral environment which helps to differentiate us from animals and lead to our development and flourishing as persons.

Before going on to look at the relationship between sexual desire and morality, I wish now to address the concept of gender, and the role it plays in conservative philosophy.

The term gender has two levels of understanding:



"It expresses the concept which informs our intentional understanding of sex; it also denotes the artefact which we construct in response to that understanding, and whereby we embellish, exaggerate or conceal our sexual nature."<sup>6</sup>

Hence it is the term we use to categorise our perceived sexual differences, as well as describing the consequences and reactions we have to these differences. Some commentators may deny either the relevance of gender, or its existence per se. Scruton identifies one form of such an argument which he calls Kantian feminism. From this position, what I essentially am is a person, which is distinct from my body, and it is from the idea of personhood that my freedom in the form of rights, values and choices emanate. Any physical characteristics cannot give credence to altering my value or how I am treated. Any differences between the masculine and feminine are artificial social constructs, serving particular political purposes. Hence it is wrong to assume that persons are fundamentally masculine or feminine.<sup>7</sup>

Scruton offers three criticisms of this position. Firstly he claims that such an approach provides an unconvincing account of the concept of gender. Can it really have been created just to reinforce a male dominated political power system. Secondly it fails to take adequate account of our relationship to our bodies; the fact that we are embodied and do not have a metaphysical divide between our rational core and physical outer-shell. Thirdly, Kantian feminists do not take into account that in so much as gender is an artificial construction, then so to is the human person. The concept of person is an achievement that requires a social interaction.

Before proceeding further into an account of gender it is worth also clarifying what is meant by the concept of embodiment, and its relevance to gender and sexual desire.

It is sometimes suggested by philosophers that there is a division or duality about human beings, with a metaphysical self or core being located in a physical shell or body. This is perhaps the underlying thought behind what was termed Kantian feminism. The materialist conception of sexuality is opposed to such a view identifying the self and the body as one. A conservative philosophy of sexuality would not support such a materialist conception, nor would they give credence to the "Kantian" approach. What the conservative defends is an intentional understanding of sexuality. While we express ourselves and interrelate as though the self is separate from the body, we do operate through our bodies, and in some way I only seem to know you through relating to your body. It is a public expression of the other person as self. As Scruton argues there is a tension between me as having a body, and me as my body; that I am totally bound to my physicality yet feel separate from it. It is when we loose control over our bodies in involuntary actions, eg blushing, crying, that we see a visible expression of the person incarnate.

Embodiment can be something of a mystery to us because of our first person perspective. As a consequence of this ability to "separate" ourselves from our bodies we are able to analyse our bodily existence and define it within the boundaries of social roles. We impose laws and manners on our behaviour, we wear distinguishing clothes and even physically refine our bodies. We also transform our sex into gender. The transformation of the body in this manner is the aim of sexual morality.

Scruton makes the interesting claim that while it is important to acknowledge the concept of gender, we must also acknowledge the different conceptions of it. I may have views on ideals of male and female conduct which you may disagree with. While we may both disagree about the conceptions of gender, we can still agree on it as a

concept, and have similar views on the concept of sex. I shall return to discuss this idea later in the chapter.

Our conceptions of gender are informed by our conceptions of sex. This becomes clear during the sexual act, when one is overwhelmed, and our sexuality and animal nature are revealed. Gender is the socialisation of this nature.

"In the final surrender to desire, we experience our incarnate nature; we know, then, the "truth" of gender: which is that, as embodied creatures we are inseparable from our sex."<sup>8</sup>

Scruton describes gender as part of a "moral kind". We take certain physical characteristics, eg hair, bodily shape, and refine them so as to present an identifying object for sexual desire. Hence gender and its rooting in sex become part of the social arrangement. Not only can it be seen, for example, in different modes of dress, but also in the development of separate characters, virtues, and social roles. Gender is also a political concept, as our personalities are shaped by institutions which we create and sustain. Indeed, the complexity of gender distinctions is a reflection of a developed social arrangement, governed by a state.<sup>9</sup>

Hence Scruton offers an explanation of gender which both is informed by and informs our physical and sexual nature. We are male and female, and the way we socially express it is determined by the conceptions of gender found within our societies. Hence sexual desire is not an accident but comes from my embodied self. This is in direct conflict with those views, such as Kantian feminism, which stresses the idea of personhood situated in a physical body rather than embodied. Such an approach can give rise to the view that sexuality can be chosen, and in its most extreme form changed. Sex change operations are consequently not only physically dangerous, but also morally questionable as they abandon traditional views on sexual desire and gender.



"But as with every attempt to undermine our power to accept our destiny, the consequences are felt not by the patient only, but by the whole community. We are forced to revise our perceptions of sexuality, in a direction which in fact deprives us of our most necessary emotions. Thus, by increasing our control over the human body, there comes a point where we lose familiarity with the human soul."<sup>10</sup>

I now wish to examine in more detail Scruton's account of sexual desire and the consequences this has for morality and politics before making an assessment of his project.

Scruton begins his account of sexual desire by considering the concept of sexual arousal. This is not a sensational pleasure, but an intentional pleasure based on contemplation of an object. Hence arousal is only possible between human beings, as only they have rationality and first person perspective necessary for individualising objects. It requires a response to the thought of the other as a self-conscious agent, who in turn must be able to reciprocate such intentions. During arousal we become more aware of our embodiment, with our sexual organs becoming significant conveyers of our intentions. We are focused on a particular individual, and this focus cannot be directed onto another without changing the epistemology and intentionality of the arousal.

The idea of the particular or individualising is of particular importance in sexual desire. Sexual desire cannot be satisfied in the same way that hunger can. What is wanted is not the body of the other person but their embodiment. Desire has a developing content with the initial aim being physical contact with the person causing arousal. It does not stop at this, instead demanding the sexual arousal of the other and their increasing identification with the sexual act. It is differentiated from animal coupling in that the sensation satisfaction or pleasure stimulation are not the end point; sexual desire is not terminated in orgasm. Instead it progresses towards



intimacy and erotic love, where both parties are totally committed to the life and aspirations of the other party.

"Every developed form of sexual desire will tend to reach beyond the present encounter to a project of inner union with its object."<sup>11</sup>

Some philosophers, eg Plato, Kant, believe that sexual desire has no place in love. For Kant desire reflects our more basic or animal nature, more akin to an appetite, contradicting the second formulation of the categorical imperative which prohibits the use of another as a means rather than as a moral end. Such a position has two interesting and extreme consequences. It could provide a case for chastity, or it could provide a case for permissiveness. If both parties were willing, and neither used the other for purely his own purposes, then there could be no moral reproach for sexual promiscuity. However, what Kant fails to do in his theory is to confuse animal wanting with the sexual desire that only rational beings, with first person perspective can possess. He denies the importance of embodiment and the individualising nature of sexual desire.

The importance of the individual object in Scruton's work on sexual desire would appear to be influenced by his views on aesthetics. It is beneficial briefly to examine these views before returning to look at the influence they have on sexual desire.

Scruton identifies two types of interests; one type is an interest in means to achieve an end, the other as an interest for its own sake. The former could be an interest in, for example, a computer. I require such and such a machine so it is able to run X programme in order for me to write my Ph.D.. In such a case:

"My purpose defines criteria of relevance, which enable me to set aside those features of the

object which are relevant to its assessment from those which are not."<sup>12</sup>

Aesthetic interest falls into the second category. It is an interest that is not directed towards an external purpose or goal, nor is it related to a bodily appetite. These are interests which Kant argued are related to our abilities as rational beings; they are rational interests, or "disinterested interests". Moral questions are also disinterested interests. Like aesthetics they attempt to transcend empirical conditions and look beyond immediate and transitory purposes. If we make an aesthetic judgement, or a moral judgement, we are making an objective statement, aspiring to a universal viewpoint. Hence an aesthetic attitude is

"a kind of spectator interest, whose object is the uniqueness or individuality of some work of art or other object of aesthetic interest. It issues, therefore, in a particular mode of evaluation of its object, in which the idea of a feature relevant to assessment can have no place."<sup>13</sup>

Scruton identifies a number of characteristics of disinterested interest. It is an interest in the phenomenal world; the world as we perceive it. That it is appreciated as a perceptual experience but also for its own sake. I wish to study and enjoy what is before me, but do not wish to change or consume it. Also when we take part in aesthetic contemplation there is a twofold search for meaning. One form resides in the experience, the other is obtained through it. eg we experience both forms of meaning if an art critic is describing the painting that is before us. Finally aesthetic interest is one that is repeated and cannot be satisfied as a simple want can be satisfied.

An example of actions, whose purpose is intrinsic to them, is found in the concept of friendship. Aristotle identified three types of friendships<sup>14</sup>: those founded in pleasure, utility, and for their own sake. It is the last type which

is the highest form of friendship, where the other is valued as an end, not as a means. This type of friendship is the form exhibited between virtuous people. Friendship may have beneficial consequences, eg in helping to produce a loyal society based on ideas of community. However, as soon as these consequences are prioritised as the worth of friendship, then friendship no longer exists, as an external purpose has been smuggled in.

"In friendship everything is an end, nothing is a means only. I strive to please you; I do things for your sake, and not for any interest of mine...the end is you."<sup>15</sup>

If I now return to the individual object in interpersonal relationships, and in particular sexual desire, it can be argued that there are many similarities with aesthetic attitudes. Aesthetic attitudes like sexual desire have a particular object, not a universal one. They are also both attentive attitudes. Aesthetic attitudes do have reasons in their responses in a way sexual desire, with its involuntary responses, does not. Yet reasons can be given for the sense of arousal after it has been experienced. It may be argued that there is a difference in that aesthetics is purposeless, whereas sexual desire has a purpose, the arousal of sexual desire in the other person. Whilst this is a purpose it is not one that can be satisfied in any immediate manner, or one that produces a sense of fulfilment, as an orgasm may do within lust. Sexual desire has a long-term purpose, which builds and changes through the relationship. Hence the boundaries between the purposeful, and the purposeless are blurred.

There are two further ways in which sexual desire and aesthetic interest coincide. Firstly the object of both is non-transferable; I cannot replace one person with another and have the same feelings, as I cannot replace one painting with another and appreciate it in the same way. This does not mean that desire is exclusive. One may desire



several people but not with the same desire. Finally aesthetic interest and sexual desire cannot be detached from the actual experience of the subject of desire, in exactly the same way that we cannot admire a painting without seeing it.

The stress on the importance of the individual object of sexual desire has caused some commentators to argue that there is a paradox inherent within it. That if the aim of desire is the literal union with the other person, then this cannot be obtained, and hence it is a meaningless project. The paradox revolves around the idea of individuality and the ability of the other person to possess it in a bodily form. Scruton argues that these ideas can be seen in the work of many writers, including Hegel and the Master and Slave dialectic<sup>16</sup>. However, it is Sartre's<sup>17</sup> views on the dilemma that he spends most time discussing, and it is to that work which I now wish to briefly turn.

Sartre supports the view that sexual desire is not a mere animal instinct, a mere physical stimulation, but that the individuality of the other person is important. He argues that the aim of sexual desire is twofold: to "incarnate" the first person perspective of the other in their body, and to unite with them as flesh. And there are two ways in which this uniting can take place, one through sexual desire and the other through sado-masochism. Sartre believes that the former collapses into the latter as we can never fully unite with another's first-person perspective, only heighten the sense of embodiment, while at the same time surrender my own first-person perspective.

The paradox that Sartre believes is present in sexual desire can be derived from Hegel's Master and Slave dialectic. When I experience sexual desire it is towards another person who possesses an individual essence or first



person perspective. What I wish to do is to control this person, denying their freedom. This will cause them to resent me and so I fantasise that they wish to be controlled and be subject to my lust. Yet this denies me what I initially wanted, as the person, subject to my desire, has been objectified and turned into an imaginary person. Hence the outcome of sexual desire resembles sadism as I am using the other person to obtain a response which I observe but do not share.

Whilst Scruton agrees that there is a paradox in sadism, he denies that sexual desire collapses in to sadism. Instead it leads to what he terms "mutual service". He rejects Sartre's view because he argues that it is based on a false conception of freedom. Sartre offers a metaphysical conception of freedom; the idea that I am my freedom. Hence if in sexual desire I want you, then I am also appropriating your freedom, and therefore denying the very thing that I wish to possess. For Scruton,

"the desire to possess may be a feature of love: it may even be a feature of desire. But it is not an essential feature of either."<sup>18</sup>

Freedom, according to Scruton, is the ability to act in accordance with and be influenced by reason. The actuality of sexual attraction and participation in the sexual act is a demonstration of my freedom, as it is only possible between rational beings. What is given is not freedom as Sartre would argue, but the individuality of the first person perspective.

Sexual desire requires mutual attraction and a reflexive response of intentions. This is symbolised in the look of desire, and culminated in bodily love making. Initially it involves mutual arousal, but expands so that I wish the other person to have knowledge of my embodied self as I have knowledge of them. I also wish to imagine how I am viewed through the other's eyes. Hence the paradox that I

cannot see me through your eyes can be countered by the ability to imagine. Hence the use by some of mirrors in love-making. Yet there is a deeper paradox. I desire to hold your body and gain pleasure from its physical nature. It is real and substantive. At the same time I wish to unite with you as your body, with you raised up and identifying with it. This process I wish to have reciprocated within me. I wish to produce and exhibit involuntary actions which are a sign of this heightened embodiment, eg I do not want to kiss the mouth but the smile on the lips. And this symbolizes what Scruton argues is the trouble of the long-term project of desire. That within desire what we seek to hold in the other's body is the perspective which is revealed from it and cannot be isolated and obtained. Hence desire remains ultimately unsatisfied.

It is perhaps worth considering at this point what is the relationship between love and sexual desire. Plato<sup>19</sup> argued that desire had no place in love, as it is centred on man's animal instincts. It is at best only related to love in an almost accidental fashion. Erotic love may appear to be born in desire, but can only survive if it transcends it. In fact erotic love arises from the realisation of the beauty of another person, which is the visible expression of the immortal soul of that person. Hence desire is an immediate attraction that can be diverted into something higher, eros. Eros in its highest form exists between people of the same sex because since then sex has nothing to do with its aim.

Plato's view on love is in direct conflict with the argument that sexual desire is not an animal instinct but can only happen between rational beings. What is required is the arousal and union with a particular person, not the satisfaction of a physical want with another of the species. On this view love is related to sexual desire as

it identifies an individual person as the object of love.  
Love implies an

"Overriding desire to be with you, profiting from your company, recognised by you as part of your good, as you are recognised by me as part of mine"<sup>20</sup>

Unlike sexual desire, which produces involuntary responses, love is reasoned based, searching for meaning and justifying reasons in the other person. Initially this is associated with the body of the person where we first view the incarnate personality. It is reflected in our imagination in an ultimate physical union. Hence in the early experience of love there is a desire to see the object of our love. I then require you to acknowledge the individuality of my existence as I do of yours. It culminates in the desire to be with the person, and to live our lives together. Hence the union of two people is sanctified by vows and not contracts, as vows make a commitment that is not dependant on unforeseen circumstances.

The association of love with the physical nature of the one that is the subject of the love can be seen in the use of the term "beautiful" when talking about them. It is not a descriptive term but an expressive one, identifying a certain interest. It corresponds to its use in aesthetic debate, where a particular meaning is interpreted from a work of art, and it is afforded the title of beautiful. There are reasons for awarding the term. Similarly in erotic love meaning is seen in the appearance of the person before us, and the love is grounded in that meaning. It is like aesthetic interest in that it is immediate and reasoned based, and whereby it is justified in a meaning waiting to be disclosed. Erotic love is evaluative, and what is evaluated is not a metaphysical account of the personality of another person, but an embodied, real entity, situated here and now. A first person perspective



in a physical form. It is from such an account of love, and in experiencing it, that we can fully understand our abhorrence at eg torture and rape. It can also help to explain the reactions we display to certain uses of the body, and help to produce a defence of the normal in sexual practices.

From the above account it must be argued that the act of experiencing and participating in sexual desire has a profound effect on the human personality. The uniting of rational and bodily capabilities can produce a tumult of emotions which will have consequences for the social arrangement. Hence the conservative will wish to argue for some form of control over sexual practices in the form of moral laws. I now wish to discuss the role of morality in sexual desire, and how this relates to the state.

If the conservative is going to offer a theory of morality which applies directly to sexual practices, then they must wish to distinguish between "normal" practices and those deemed abnormal or perversions. Scruton is quite specific on this, and makes a distinction between normal practices and those he terms average. For example, if the majority of adults engaged in sadistic sexual practices then this would still be termed a perversion, and not normal, even though the average person took part in it. Its classification as a perversion-would be because of the sadist's denial of the rationality and self-consciousness of their victim.

As has been argued, sexual desire involves both our animal instincts, and our capacities as a rational being. This unity is the product of human interaction within the social environment. Within the environment our rationality develops, and through the development of linguistic practices we are able to develop the consciousness of our first person perspectives. This is reflected in sexual



desire where what is achieved is the arousal of the self and ultimately the other person; it has an interpersonal content. Hence a perversion can be deemed any sexual practice which denies the coupling of rational and animal characteristics, or negates an interpersonal response. One of the clearest examples is bestiality, where a person has sex with an animal. As an animal lacks the ability to exhibit sexual desire, then all that is being achieved is either the satisfaction of a physical urge, or a fantasy whereby the animal is imagined to be a person. In the latter case it shows that the person is unable to cope with the demands of another person, and is consequently not experiencing true sexual desire. Hence bestiality can be deemed a perversion.

It is important to note that this approach to defining perversions is related to the act itself. It is not based on liberal ideas on the consent of those taking part, or on utilitarian grounds on the consequences of the actions. This distinction can be highlighted by the case of paedophilia. The paedophile wishes to become involved with a child because they can control the child before them, and do not have to cope with the demands of another person. The child is viewed as not able to fully participate as a rational agent, capable of interpersonal responses, and hence not able to experience sexual desire. This is encapsulated in ideas such as the innocence of children, and the fact that their actions are viewed as being pre-moral, with no substantive claims of blame accredited to them. We therefore adopt the legal condition of an age of consent on sexual acts; an almost arbitrary age related to a threshold between child and adult. It is an age where we are deemed to be capable of interpersonal relationships, and is not related to physical characteristics. Hence paedophilia is not based on sexual desire, but is a power relationship. It should be condemned, not because of the lack of consent of the child, as there are many things

children are forced to do e.g. go to school, nor because of the harm it may cause, but because the very act denies the essence of human sexuality.<sup>21</sup>

From the above argument it can be inferred that the consent of those taking part in a particular sexual act is not enough, on the conservative view, to prevent public condemnation. I now wish to examine the consequences such a position has for a theory of sexual morality, and the role the state has within such a moral system.

Scruton defines morality as

"a condition upon practical reasoning. It is a constraint upon reasons for action, which is felt by most rational beings and which is, furthermore, a normal consequence of first person perspective. Morality must be understood, therefore, in first-person terms: in terms of the reasoning that leads to action."<sup>22</sup>

For the liberal the important factor in moral decision making is the rational choice of the agent, and the consent of those whom the decision will effect. For Kant the Categorical Imperative is available to all those who are capable of rational formulation, and is hence universal and can therefore involve the state in its promotion and development. Modern liberals tend to shy away from this position. They view the state as an organisation based on the consent and agreement of its members. They seem to defend, even only tacitly, the position that on areas of disagreement the state should remain neutral. Such an area being morality. This argument is "reinforced" by the view that in sexual practices the act is a physical one, and that if those taking part in it consent, and no harm is done to any non-consenting party, then such acts become almost amoral.

As Scruton points out there does appear to be a dilemma for the liberal in the second of the above positions<sup>23</sup>. If they

wish to defend the primacy of rational choice, yet at the same time acknowledge the potential disagreements on the outcome of moral systems, then they are taking into account the fact that other factors play a role in determining morality in addition to rationality. Such factors e.g. religion may not regard morality as matters of choice, and may not be tolerant of other approaches. It also questions the primacy of first person autonomy, so central to much of liberal thinking.

The Kantian project is subject to criticism for lacking a motivational content. If we are to strive for the "autonomy of the will", whereby we are motivated by reason alone with no reference to an embodied person, the question can be raised as to why "I" should perform X. The reason why I feel compelled to perform an action can be related to many factors, which will include reasoning, but will also include external factors such as desire, appetite, honour, personal profit; those factors which Kant wished to disregard under the heading of the heteronomy of the agent. For Kant morality is derived from the primacy of the transcendental self, and pure reason. For the conservative the importance is in the existence of embodied persons and how they interrelate.

In the previous chapter I outlined how conservatives value Aristotelian style virtue ethics. And it is this approach Scruton wishes to use when constructing a secular ethical theory encompassing sexual morality. For the Aristotelian what is important in ethics is the personal achievement of happiness. This is not immediate want satisfaction, but a long-term goal associated with fulfilling human potential, or flourishing. Flourishing has two components, one involving health, the other involving the development of our rational nature. It is the latter which is the most important.



As a rational being I am able to formulate my desires into intentions and actions. If that is so then it seems reasonable that I should wish to be successful in my projects. Yet in order for me to flourish I wish to be able not only to possess the right skills to achieve my ends, but also to be able to identify the right ends or virtues. Hence the virtues are those actions which cause me to flourish as a person. They are arrived at by reasoned argument, and given motivational content by moral education. Moral reasoning requires not only first person perspective, but also a third person perspective. I must be able to "step outside" of my actions in order to see how others view what I am doing, and hence provide them with a universal content. e.g. if I perform a certain act courageously I must be able to say why courage is a virtue and why one should act courageously. It must be a statement on what it means to flourish as a person. Hence the aim of moral education is to teach children what aims and desires they should cultivate, by offering them reasoned argument, but perhaps more importantly by showing him examples from within his society of what the virtuous man or woman looks like in practice.

The virtue ethic approach to morality can produce a secular account of sexual morality, in which instant sexual gratification is replaced by commitment and fidelity. The Aristotelian project provides a conception of man whose development and flourishing is a long term project; it is not immediate but involves a relationship to a person's past and future projects. Feelings such as remorse and regret reveal an attitude to an action and a wish to respond to its influence in the future. Such an ability is only available to animals with first person perspective; creatures that are sure of their self-attribution and hence their identity. Indeed, it is only through the development of my identity through time that I am able to become a fully developed person. If I do feel remorse about a past



act then this implies a unity with my past identity. It also implies a wish to respond to the past in my future actions. Thus I become an active subject, not just responding to events and other impersonal forces, but one who determines his own destiny, and who can begin to be called free.

Such a person begins to develop new relations to his desires. An object of desire must be more than just desirable, but must also be viewed of as a value. This is of major importance for the development of full self-consciousness. As Scruton states:

"A world without values is one in which all activity has an ending, but no activity has an end."<sup>24</sup>

To identify an object of desire as desirable involves a new perspective on deliberation. No longer are we just seeking the means to an end, but we are now deliberating on ends themselves. This has an effect on the well-being of the agent. If I obtain an object which I do not value then an immediate want is satisfied but there is no long term benefit. If however I value the object then my well-being is enhanced, and I exhibit emotions such as esteem and pride. Obtaining the object gives me credit.

Hence the task of morally educating my children is to develop the faculty of rational choice and deliberation, attaching value to the objects of desire, and benefiting from their acquisition. They must learn the dispositions of pride, remorse etc. when learning of the responsibilities of interpersonal relations. And they must learn to desire what "in general human conditions"<sup>25</sup> is deemed to be of value, i.e. virtue.

From the above account of the Aristotelian project it can be argued that the fulfilment of the first-person perspective is only possible within a social context,

involving the interrelations of other like persons, who are able to debate and agree on values. We develop a third-person perspective on our actions and the actions of others, deliberating values and accepting the praise and blame of other agents.

The Aristotelian account of the virtues can provide us with the method to discern and live according to sexual virtues. The first of the virtues is the capacity to give and receive erotic love. Love is the natural outcome, or telos, of sexual desire. As was stated above, love produces a sense of worth, generated by the ultimate need of the other person, and the sense of value produced by shared projects. I develop a sense of my own awareness through my own eyes, and through the eyes of the other person. However, love can produce jealousy, and in order to counter this sexual fidelity should be a part of morality. As Scruton states:

"no society, and no common-sense morality looks with favour upon promiscuity or infidelity, unless influenced by a doctrine of "emancipation" or "liberation" which is dependent for its sense upon the very conventions it defies."<sup>26</sup>

Sexual desire is inherently nuptial, leading to vows of love.

Scruton defends what he terms traditional sexual education because it attempted to follow the path of sexual virtue. The most important feature of this tradition was the idea of "pollution", whereby the body has been misused either by ourselves, or, in the case of rape, by someone else. It is the fear of ourselves becoming just our bodies, and hence denying our embodied rational essence. This idea of pollution manifests itself into the practice of chastity. Chastity has a meaning that is socially determined. It attempts to moderate and control sexual wants, educating them to their higher rational end. The chaste person is revered because they are delaying sexual desire until it

becomes an interpersonal project, whereby the other person is wanted as a person, not just as a body. Hence a child that loses their innocence may achieve bodily pleasure, but this will be transitory with multiple objects as they lack the rational development to partake of full interpersonal relationships.

Hence the task of sexual morality has been to maintain the connection between the personal and the sexual, maintaining the intentional nature of desire, and preparing individuals for the demands of erotic love. If this project is threatened or defeated then there is a danger of a moral divide occurring between the physical\body and the person. Hence there is a danger of sexual desire and erotic love being subverted by perversion and lust. In both of these forms sexual desire is translated into sexual release, denying the interpersonal responses of the other person.

Traditional sexual morality is also against fantasy. Within fantasy the interpersonal relationship is again denied, with the object(s) being compliant and often victims of sexual assaults, with power exercised in a violent and depersonalised nature. Fantasy has a connection with prostitution whereby the prostitute can be bought and hence commodified; sexual desire becomes part of the market place, and as such lacks a moral content. Hence fantasy should not be seen as harmless. Within the fantasist's world moral-norms do not exist, and license can be given to whatever acts can be imagined. This has an effect on the person partaking of the fantasy as those he encounters in the real world become characters in sexual projects, and hence their personal nature is denied.

"The harmless wanker with the video-machine can at any moment turn into the desperate rapist with the gun."<sup>27</sup>

Hence the conservative will be against pornography, not necessarily for arguments about its consequences, or



questions of consent, but because it attacks the very nature of sexual desire and erotic love, and undermines the society based on it.<sup>28</sup>

Hence traditional sexual morality seeks to defend the person that is embodied in their body. It sees to unify the rational and physical. It can be argued that those arguing for "sexual liberation" are denying this link and hence becoming subservient to their physical needs at the expense of rational commitment. Sexual desire involves the sexual expression reflecting the person and not just his physical requirements. Moral education may have the form of the Aristotelian "mean", whereby desire is directed towards what is desirable while competing with the demands of lust and frigidity. Education will require knowledge of sexual temperance, with right action of the subject sometimes being chastity, sometimes fidelity, and other times sexual desire. Practical reason will be used to decide on the object of desire and on the appropriate response on how to achieve it.

It should now be clear that on the above account sexual desire is not something given, but something that is achieved; for Scruton it is a social artefact. And as such Scruton is one with those conservatives, eg Devlin<sup>29</sup>, who see a positive role for the state and law in the promotion of particular moral values. Indeed the social arrangement in which we live constructs our conception of gender and sexuality and also gives it meaning. We value the virtues because these are the values that are revered in an immediate way within our society. Practical reason requires our moral intuitions to be in a state of equilibrium with the moral language issuing forth from the society in which we are a member. If our ethical system is based on the values of long-term achievement and happiness over immediate want satisfaction and choice driven autonomy, as well as valuing people and objects for their particular



nature rather than as just another example of a species or type, then society should reflect this and the state defend those institutions that promote such values.

The above stance comes into immediate conflict with a liberal conception of the state. Liberalism assumes and encourages moral pluralism, and as such argues that the state has a limited role in regulating moral issues. The main guiding principle of liberal ethics is that the only acts that are forbidden are those which cause harm to other parties. However, harm is a difficult concept to both identify and quantify. In cases of physical abuse it is relatively easy to see. Yet cases of e.g. emotional, psychological, and spiritual abuse are less easy to decide upon. Let us take the case of rape. A rape victim is not always physically harmed, but it is still seen as immoral and a crime because the harm may be eg psychological. However, let us suppose that the victim is unwittingly drugged. They wake up remembering nothing of the attack and carry on their life with no problems. One day someone comes along and tells the police that they witnessed the attack. The police tell the victim what has happened who still remembers nothing and is not particularly traumatised by the news. It is unclear how a liberal conception of law could prosecute those who perpetrated the crime. They might concede that no harm has been done, yet claim that it is still a crime because the victim did not consent. This too seems problematic as it appears to be placing consent on a higher moral position than harm, and at odds with a common-sense approach to morality. There are many acts that we may not consent to, e.g. as children going to school, driving on the left hand side of the road. It is hard to see how a state could run without us being subject to actions which we disapprove of, yet still we are forced to accept their consequences.

The conservative has a way out of this dilemma. Whilst

consequences, consent and harm are important, what is condemned is the nature of the very act. Rape is wrong because it denies the individual existence and personal response of the other person, no matter what the particular circumstances of the assault were. Any acts that deny the long-term aim of sexual desire as outlined above, in favour of immediate physical want satisfaction should be subject to the intervention of the state. In such cases the state should actively discourage certain practices or dispositions, which may in some cases lead to legal prohibition. When the conservative does talk of consent, e.g. in the age of consent to sexual intercourse, what is being referred to is that the person is not yet at a stage of rational deliberation to undertake the emotional and psychological rigours of a sexual relationship.

The conservative is then able to condemn certain practices, while at the same time promote others. One way this is achieved, Scruton argues, is through the state encouraging those associations which help to develop ideas of loyalty, continuity overtime, and contribute to the rational development of the individual. This view is obviously influenced by Hegel's ideas on civil society. Whilst Scruton does not wish to go as far as Hegel, he does defend the value of institutions and other autonomous groups whereby the duties that are performed by the member are not strictly defined by contract, but are performed out of ideas of loyalty, and a sense of recognition by an organisation which one is proud to belong<sup>30</sup>.

One such institution that is of supreme importance is that of religion. Scruton is perhaps less concerned with the "truth" in the existence of God per se, but in its relevance to society in providing a sense of the sacred and giving transcendental meaning. He argues that it fills the void felt within the social practices of custom, ceremony and custom.

"No better way has ever been devised of giving substance to human vows and human values than the belief in a transcendental order, and in the eternal presence of the dead."<sup>31</sup>

The importance of religion has been undercut in society by many factors, e.g. rationalism, belief in progress. And Scruton argues that it is not the task of politics to restore it, as the possible consequences of such actions are themselves a threat to the autonomous institutions that he sees as so invaluable. Yet the very loss of the idea of the sacred challenges the ideas of duty based on projections of one's identity over time, and returns us back to the ethics of the first-person perspective. Hence ideas of innocence and the obscene become rejected and sexual morality is corrupted. Changes in sexual practice in this manner provide an index to the state of institutional crisis.

Associations and institutions play an important role in our lives. We worship together through churches, we play through clubs, and we learn through educational institutions. Our sexual relations too require some form of public enlargement and recognition, and this is achieved through marriage. In his discussion of marriage Scruton echoes many of Hegel's views. For Hegel:

"Marriage, and essentially monogamy, is one of the absolute principles on which the ethical life of a community is based; the institution of marriage is therefore included as one of the moments in the foundation of states by gods or heroes"<sup>32</sup>

Marriage is a non-contractual union, which generates obligations which cannot be explained in terms of promises made in advance, or on the promise of future benefits. It helps to temper sexuality, especially male, by focusing it on a particular person and developing its long-term goal with the idea of creating children. It produces a sense of responsibility in the need to provide for the members of



the family, as well as developing ideas of responsibility and value to the property required for its flourishing. The marriage ceremony is itself important as a public statement of transition for the individuals concerned to membership of a moral and sacred institution. And as such the vows undertaken should not be treated legally like contractual obligation, but should require difficulty in termination. The attempt to turn marriage into a contract is its greatest threat as it changes its very nature and will make such relationships much more transitory and subject to experimentation and constant searching for a "better deal".

It is within the family that children should be conceived and brought up. It is important that they learn the value of authority and obligations that they did not consent to. They must be disciplined and subject to moral education so that they can flourish as fully rational beings and hence be free. They must develop the sense of piety, whereby they recognise their duties to other family members; duties not based on contract. It is within the family that they first become exposed to private property, which again is available to all members. Children learn the value of this property and in contributing to its worth as a value to the family. Hence it can be seen that public declaration of marriage produces an additional statement over the privacy of the relationship, in that parents are responsible for the upbringing of their children, and the family responsible for its acquisition and disposal of their property. Property can be inherited, reinforcing the sense of continuity over time.

Those who attack marriage and the family, eg the Marxist, the feminist or some forms of liberal, will do so by offering some theory of liberation from an oppressive system. For example the system may be patriarchal, denying true sexuality, or underpinning a particular economic system that is inherently oppressive. Essentially these



criticisms can be termed "ideological"; that they are offering an alternative view on life which is either persuasive or not. For the conservative they depend on a picture of man that is abstract and too far from our practical experience to be knowable in any meaningful way. They deny the full potential of the rational being and his relationship to his surrounding world. Scruton offers a defence of sexual morality, wishing to promote marriage and the institutions that promote it. He challenges his critics by claiming:

"The world of the "consenting adult", the world remade in accordance with the "social contract" of the enlightened liberal conscience, is, in the last analysis, a world too timid for love."<sup>33</sup>

One of the areas that I have so far failed to discuss is conservative approaches to homosexuality. I now wish to analyse Scruton's view on this subject, highlighting the difficulties of his position, before making some more general comments on his overall project.

Scruton is against homosexuality, but has great difficulty in providing a philosophical justification for his position. He also appears confused as to what the moral and political consequences should be for his feelings. Hence within "Sexual Desire" he discusses homosexuality within the Chapter entitled "Perversion", yet at the end of his discussion he is philosophically unsure why it should be there.

Homosexuality produces an immediate response of revulsion when viewed by heterosexual or sexually "normal" people. We are repelled by what we deem as obscene, whereby bodies are viewed as taking part in an unnatural act which changes the focus of our attention away from the emotions being expressed, instead directing it towards the bodies of the participants. It induces in us what Scruton terms as a

"Schutzgefühl - a protective feeling, whereby the self guards against invasion"<sup>34</sup> He offers four main reasons why we should feel this way and why such attitudes are of value for society.

Firstly, sexual desire is related to the idea of a uniting of opposites. Such a view can be defended from a Christian theological position of the complimentary nature and perfection of God's creation of man and woman. Or it can be a secular position whereby sexual desire involves the awakening and demands for recognition from a rational being that is essentially unknown to us. It requires a moral courage that reinforces the belief in sexual desire only being possible for fully rational beings willing to take the risks of such a project. Homosexual arousal lacks such an experience as the other's body is in essence already known. It lacks the sense of a "spiritual awakening" as the mystery in the other is lacking. Homosexuality is a form of narcissism by seeking to arouse in the other what I already feel. It also seeks to deny the importance of the embodied self revealed in our genders. Hence

"The loss of the revulsion against homosexuality therefore takes us one step further along the road to de-sanctifying of the human body. It becomes easier to see the sexual act as an animal performance, rather than a spiritual journey."<sup>35</sup>

The second reason why homosexuality should be opposed is the familial aspect of normal sexuality. Sexual union involves a commitment to future generations enshrined in ideas of marriage and the family. Homosexuality obviously has no such consequences and may therefore veer towards the liberal idea of sexuality as an agreement or contract between consenting adults. This has consequences for society which is based on the family and successful nurturing of children. This idea of contract is related to a third criticism of homosexuality which is that it tends to promiscuity. The natural predatory nature of male

sexuality is not tempered by the presence of the female, and this, linked to the knowledge of the others body, means that there is a tendency towards experimentation and changing of partners. This lessens the intentional nature of sexual desire, and is contrary to the interests of society. The final objection that Scruton offers against homosexuality is somewhat controversial. He claims that certain homosexuals, especially men, are attracted to children. However, this can be of benefit to society as the schutzgefühl encourages them to sublimate their desire, instead becoming priests, school teachers, scout masters etc.

As has been argued throughout this chapter the conservative does not wish to condemn particular sexual acts because of harm or consent, nor do they wish to condone acts in private if they feel that the acts themselves negate the true nature of sexual desire. Yet on the issue of homosexuality Scruton wishes to argue against this position. He states:

"for the condemnation of those who engage in homosexual behaviour is compatible with the view that each has a right to live as he wishes in *private*. It has always been a requirement of sexual morality, that public scandal be avoided, and private practice concealed. The distinction between the private and the public is indeed integral to any sexual morality that could commend itself to normal conscience. If you say that those things which are done privately should be condoned publicly then you may soon come to the conclusion that there is no such thing as sexual morality, but only irrational feelings of distaste. If, on the other hand, you recognise that certain acts are shameful, and must therefore be concealed if they are to be performed at all, you may still hold that we have no right to cross another's threshold, into the world of "rights" where he alone is sovereign, so as to prevent him from performing them. That, surely, was the traditional position, in its most civilised form."<sup>36</sup>

Instead of openly condemning homosexuality we should



instead morally educate our children to feel revulsion when viewing it, and shame if we experience homosexual feelings. Certain areas of sexuality should be "endarkened", and not investigated. And one of the best ways that this is achieved is through the force of religion.

The above discussion of the difference between acts carried out in private and public appears to be in direct conflict with Scruton's earlier views on the subject. In *Sexual Desire* Scruton cites Diogenes attempt to unravel the distinction. Diogenes is supposed to have masturbated in public as he ate in public, claiming that the moral nature of the act cannot change merely because people observe it. Scruton has some support for Diogenes:

"The moral character of our private acts may be determined by the experience of those who should never observe them."<sup>37</sup>

Hence pornography should be condemned both in public and private because even in private it encourages fantasy and the dehumanising of the person\act portrayed. Sexual intercourse should be performed in private because it requires the interpersonal responses of a man and a woman. If deliberately performed in public then those taking part are altering its internal structure and changing its meaning, while those watching are achieving a voyeuristic pleasure or revulsion because they are not part of its intentional structure. Hence it should be deemed obscene. Yet in Scruton's later essay he is more sceptical about the relevance of the Diogenes example.

This stance also comes into conflict with Scruton's views on the relationship between law, society and morality. He has earlier claimed that sexual mores are within the sphere of the law, and that private morality and public decency are related and of political concern<sup>38</sup>. However, he now wishes to condemn homosexuality, yet sanction it in private. This would seem to contradict this position.



Scruton does have two possible ways to reconcile his dilemma between private and public. He could agree with the principle of intervention in morality and private actions, while making the judgement to tolerate. This would not be based on a principle. Hence homosexuality could be conceded. However, this is problematical as it leaves open to debate which practices should be tolerated. Similarly it can be asked why should certain practices be condemned as perversion if they are going to be tolerated in private. Certain perversions e.g. paedophilia, he wishes to condemn outright. This would be difficult to do as he would need to introduce a line of argument that would differentiate between "perversions" and our moral and legal responses to them. For example one could use the consenting adults argument. However, this would not be fully acceptable as some adults may consent to be abused, and this is another perversion which he does not want to see sanctioned even in private.

Scruton could have a second approach to the problem by arguing that certain sexual acts just were permissible. The problem is "which ones?", eg sado-masochism v homosexuality. This is a difficult line to take and make definite judgements about. Nor is it really what Scruton wishes to do, as what he wants is to provide a philosophical case for and against certain acts, not pragmatic responses to particular acts and practices.

Indeed Scruton's whole case against homosexuality is problematical. He claims that there is an inherent feeling of revulsion against homosexuality, and then seeks to ground it. The reasons he offers may be good in some cases, but he has greater difficulty when confronting the homosexual couple in a permanent relationship. Here there is a particular object of desire, and whilst it is non-productive of children they could be allowed to adopt or be artificially inseminated. By debating principles the

conservative is immediately conceding ground by risking the chance of being out manoeuvred in debate, and in the very act of debating gives some credence to his opponents position as debating implies that we can be persuaded of the others point of view<sup>39</sup>. If Scruton begins to bring in the social costs of homosexuality, then he is veering towards consequentialism; a moral philosophy he does not endorse. It is better for the conservative to say that they are just against homosexuality in this society, in the manner of Burkean prejudice.

One further point to note about homosexuality is the idea of endarkening certain sexual practices through moral education. This seems to almost imply that we can "choose" to be a homosexual. While the idea of discouraging certain sexual practices appears to have some credence, it does not seem to fit with the notion of choosing our sexual orientation. Such a position is in line with those forms of liberalism which see the person as crucial, and the body as a mere external shell. Hence we choose sexually to relate to the person rather than their physical aspect. This is in conflict with the accounts of gender and embodiment discussed earlier in the Chapter.

Scruton defends the importance of moral education, and the role religion can play in this. Religion provides a basis for deciding right and wrong which philosophy, with its endless debates, cannot do. He also acknowledges that religion is in decline. It is being undercut by philosophy, as well as by institutional erosion, e.g. Sunday trading will be to the detriment of religious practice. The problem for Scruton is what should be done. Hegel believed that religion was under threat, but could be saved by philosophy, which was open to all. Scruton denies this, claiming that philosophy is only available to a few. If religion is in difficulty then it is not clear where the lead in moral education will come from. If a family is

experiencing emotional difficulties or disintegration, then it is not clear the role that they could play in providing such a guidance. Nor does it seem appropriate for schools to provide it. It raises the question whether the revival of such a moral project is possible.

Earlier in the chapter I mentioned that when discussing gender, Scruton claimed that there were different conceptions of the term, but that it was agreed that there was a concept of gender. His methodology here is drawing on the work of Rawls and Lukes<sup>40</sup>. Lukes, in his work on Power, claimed that there was a core concept of power, with varying conceptions of it. Scruton's claim is a little more problematical, in that it is far from clear that there is a core or unchallenged view on gender.

Scruton further claims that the meaning of gender is informed and informs our social situation, and in turn our moral values. If there are different conceptions of gender then this must help to create different moral systems. Hence as conceptions of gender change then so can moral values. Scruton's project of resurrecting traditional sexual morality then seems fraught with difficulties. If our views on gender have changed then how can we defend a previous moral system, as the conditions needed for the exercise of practical reason will no longer be present. It will be impossible to have a bedrock concept of normality without appealing to metaphysical constructions of human nature and intentional understanding, which is precisely what Scruton does not want to do. When discussing the moral education of children he states

"he must learn to see as desirable only that which, in general human conditions, is the occasion of fulfilment"<sup>41</sup>

It seems far from clear what general human conditions are. If we have societies with different conceptions of gender, and some societies with a number of internal conceptions,



then what the general human conditions are will be open to debate. For example, within Britain there are a number of conceptions of female gender associated with different religious traditions, political affiliations, regional differences and family ties. The "general human conditions" may be so general as to have little universal content on morality and practical reasoning.

Scruton makes some initial assumptions about human sexuality that appear to stand in a difficult relationship to one another. He makes a standard conservative assumption that the male is lustful and sexually predatory, and that because sex is a private matter the female is better at comprehending it. He also claims that the male is dominated by contract<sup>42</sup>. These two positions seem to be in conflict. The idea of contract implies rational deliberation to achieve a goal, the results of which are pre-determined. It recognises social value. Predatory implies achieving one's goals in a spontaneous manner, in an almost pre-social environment. To be sexually predatory implies a lustful and arbitrary approach to sexual union. This appears to be in opposition to the calculating idea of the contract dominated male. However, in both cases the object of sexual desire is an object, seen as a means and not an end in itself.

In his analysis of sexual desire Scruton offers a theory that places the rational nature of human beings as central to sexual union. It draws on his views of the social construct of human nature and the need for rationality to be achieved within such a context. Whilst the physical nature of the embodied human beings is of crucial importance, sexuality is not a mere animal instinct devoid of moral control. Because it arouses in us involuntary physical responses, and has an intentional consequence of procreation it must be subject to moral disciplining.

Otherwise love can be replaced by lust as the personal individual object is replaced by immediate physical want satisfaction supplied by indeterminate objects. Hence there is a need to endarken certain practices and to morally educate children so as to acquire the virtues of love, temperance and honour, and achieve their long-term flourishing. Such flourishing is best achieved within a marriage, where a family can be born, and children raised and educated. The state should be there to facilitate and defend this ethical existence.

Scruton's argument begins to waiver when he attempts to "operationalise" his views. He argues that the promotion of sexual virtue ethics will not be accessible to all by reason, but will need to be taught. However he gives no answer as to who will carry out this task if institutions such as the family and religion are already in a state of decline. His discussion on perversity gives a plausible account as why certain acts should be prohibited, but he then undermines his position with his reluctance to condemn homosexuality. His introduction of the private and public sphere argument does not clarify the matter, but only further weakens his position. Finally he wishes to defend marriage and the family, acknowledging that they are under attack and possibly in decline. Yet he offers no real answer to the form this defence should take. He claims that changes in the law away from this form of life will be accepted by the conservative "only under the pressure of necessity"<sup>43</sup>. Yet the idea of necessity appears difficult to relate to his theory. If it means that the conservative should respond to contingent political demands, then this would be at odds with his theory if he is offering a conception of the good life. Such practical difficulties should be challenged and defeated.

Once again Scruton seems to be conceding ground to his opponents as he is offering them the chance to debate

issues of sexual morality, immediately giving credence to the validity of their views. Whilst he supports the idea of endarkening sexual mores his method appears only to add further light on the arguments over issues of sexuality.



## NOTES

1. For a discussion on biological and mental differences between the sexes see:

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2. Scruton, R., Sexual Desire, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1986, p.262.

3. *ibid.*, p.255.

4. *ibid.*, p.196.

5. Wittgenstein, L., Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief, C. Barrett (ed.), Blackwell, Oxford, 1978, pp.18 & 27.

6. Scruton, *op.cit.* (Note 2), p.257.

7. *ibid.*, p.257.

8. *ibid.*, p.266.

9. For a discussion of how institutions can affect human personality see:

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10. Scruton, R., "Death and Destiny", in Untimely Tracts, Macmillan Press Ltd., Basingstoke, 1987, pp.22-23.

11. Scruton, *op. cit.*, (Note 2), p.93.

12. Scruton, R., Art and Imagination, Methuen and Co. Ltd., London, 1974, p.22.

13. *ibid.*, p.22.

14. Aristotle, The Ethics of Aristotle (The Nicomachean Ethics), trans. J.A.K. Thomson (rev. H. Tredennick), Penguin Books Ltd., London, 1976, Book VIII.

15. Scruton, R., Modern Philosophy, Sinclair-Stevenson, London, 1994, p.451.

16. Hegel, G.W.F., Phenomenology of Spirit, trans. A.V. Miller, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1977, B.IV.A, secs. 178-196.

17. Sartre, J-P., Being and Nothingness, trans. H. Barnes, Routledge, London, 1969, Part 3, Chapter 3.

18. Scruton, op. cit. (Note 2), p.124.

19. Plato, The Symposium, trans. W. Hamilton, Penguin Books Ltd., London, 1951.

20. Scruton, op. cit., (Note 2), p.239.

21. For a discussion of this point see:

Casey, J., "Humbug", The Cambridge Review, Vol.100, No.2243, March 1978, pp.93-96.

22. Scruton, op. cit., (Note 2), p.322.

23. Scruton, R., "Sexual Morality and the Liberal Consensus", in The Philosopher on Dover Beach, Carcanet, Manchester, 1990, p.262.

24. Scruton, op. cit., (Note 2), p.355.

25. *ibid.*, p.336.

26. *ibid.*, p.339.

27. *ibid.*, p.346.

28. For a discussion on pornography see:

Casey, J., "Modern Charlatanism (1) The Pornographic Lobby", The Cambridge Review, Vol.97, No.2228, October 1975;

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Scruton, R., "Fantasy and Imagination", in Untimely Tracts, The Macmillan Press Ltd., Basingstoke, 1987.

29. Devlin, P., The Enforcement of Morals, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1965.

30. See:

Hegel, G.W.F., Elements of the Philosophy of Right, trans. H.B. Nisbet, ed. A.W. Wood, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1991, esp. Secs. 250-257;

Scruton, op. cit., (Note 9), esp pp.255-266.

31. Scruton, op. cit., (Note 2), p.353.

32. Hegel, op. cit., (Note 30), Sec.167.

33. Scruton, op. cit., (Note 2), p.358.

34. Scruton, op. cit., (Note 23), p.266.

35. *ibid.*, p.268.

36. *ibid.*, pp.270-271.

37. Scruton, op. cit., (Note 2), p.319.

38. Scruton, R., The Meaning of Conservatism, Second Ed., Macmillan, London, 1984, p.76.

39. Scruton admits this very point when discussing paedophilia. See:

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40. Rawls, J., A Theory of Justice, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1972;

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41. Scruton, op. cit., (Note 2), p.336.

42. Scruton, R., "Male Domination", in Untimely Tracts, Macmillan Press Ltd., Basingstoke, 1987, p.9.

43. Scruton, op.cit., (Note 38), p.144.



### Chapter Three

#### Sex, The Family and Morality: the implications for conservative social policy

In the previous chapter I critically assessed a conservative approach to sexual desire and morality. Using the work of Roger Scruton I examined the philosophical basis of sexual attraction, its relationship to our physicality and surrounding social environment. It was argued that sexual desire was a social artefact, different from animal coupling, and centred on a particular object. Within society the rules of sexual behaviour are constructed, and conceptions of gender develop. These are reinforced by the legal practices of the state, which sanction certain acts and prohibit others. Scruton's moral virtues were based on the respect for persons and the importance of the individual object of desire, culminating in a defence of heterosexuality, fidelity and the institution of marriage. He acknowledged that such a stance was under attack, but was unsure how to defend his position.

In this chapter I wish to examine how the above philosophical position has affected the work of those writers wishing to influence social policy formulation. I shall be examining the work of various right wing think tanks, in particular the Institute of Economic Affairs, Health and Welfare Unit. I shall also be using the work of those contributors to the Salisbury Review who wish to discuss the issues of the family and sexual morality. The writers involved in these organisations wish to defend the importance of the nuclear family, while highlighting its weakening stature. They also want to claim that the decline in the status of marriage is being mirrored by a reciprocal rise in crime and incivility in British society. I wish to examine their views on these issues and in particular their defence of the importance of the family and why it has

broken down. The apparent consequences of this decline will also be discussed, and in particular whether there is a link between the decline of the family and crime and incivility. Finally I shall critically assess the prescriptions they offer to attempt to address the perceived crisis.

Many conservative commentators believe that the nuclear family, comprising of a husband and wife and children is in decline. They back up their assertion with a barrage of statistics. In 1960, 10% of marriages ended in divorce, now it is 40%. In 1970, one in twenty couples lived together before marriage, now it is one in two.<sup>1</sup> Great Britain now leads the European divorce table with a divorce rate of 12.9 per 1000 marriages. The consequence for children is that approximately one in five will experience the break up of their family by the age of sixteen, with over a million and a half children living in one-parent families, 90% headed by a woman.<sup>2</sup>

The divorce rate has also had an effect on the number of children born outside of marriage or illegitimate. In 1979, Great Britain had an illegitimacy rate of one child in ten. By 1990 it had risen to almost one child in three. Part of this increase is due to the numbers of people co-habiting. In 1975, 50% of illegitimate births were registered by both parent; this had risen to 70% by 1987.<sup>3</sup> In excess of 30% of all births in Britain are now registered to unmarried parents. It should be noted as well that approximately 25% of all illegitimate births are registered to a single mother with no fixed partner, and less than three quarters of those births occurring between partners in a stable (unmarried) relationship share the same address; seven out of ten never married mothers were living without a stable partner. It is also questioned whether cohabitation is as stable as marriage. For example one study has suggested

that nearly 50% of women cohabiting at the time of conception were alone by the time the child was twenty-one months, compared to nearly all the married couples still being together.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to the above statistics on divorce and illegitimacy men and women are getting married at an older age, and are having smaller families.<sup>5</sup> However, in 1987, 77% of people living in private households in Britain still lived as families headed by a married couple.<sup>6</sup> So while it can be claimed that the family is not as strong as it was, it cannot be claimed that it is dead or irrelevant as some of its opponents wish to do<sup>7</sup>. Conservatives also wish to resist the claims made by their opponents that there are many forms of families, the nuclear being one variant, and that the family is just undergoing a change in response to changes that have happened in society, eg the growth of feminism. These new forms of family are just as good as previous ones, and in any case the old system cannot be re-established.<sup>8</sup> As Carlson states:

"There exists today a widespread conviction that it is the social structure that determines what is to be normative. That what is, is what ought to be. This position, I would claim, is not only empirically and philosophically questionable, but what is more, it put the future of our kind of society into considerable peril."<sup>9</sup>

Before examining the reasons why there are changes in family life taking place in Britain, I first wish to examine the defence offered by conservative commentators as to why the nuclear family should be defended.<sup>10</sup>

The starting point for the defence of the nuclear family is the difference between men and women. As Novak states:

"The project of living daily with a person of the opposite sex teaches one a great deal about the



unknown mysteries of one's own sex, as well about those of the other."<sup>11</sup>

The claim that women have been systematically discriminated against, with the family being one of the main instruments for subjugating women under patriarchal power, is criticised from philosophical, scientific and historical perspectives. Wilson claims that men and women have different personalities, talents and interests which are rooted in biological, especially brain and hormonal, differences.<sup>12</sup> In particular men's brain construction facilitates their abilities to solve scientific problems, while women are better at communication and language. The increased presence of male hormones make men more competitive than women, which in turn has a direct bearing on career prospects. Women can achieve as much as men, but in general their motivational content is less. They are instead more concerned with the nature of their work and their working environment.

The above gives credence to the claim that women are better suited to rearing children than men. Their increased communication skills are related to the need to understand the wishes of inarticulate babies and small children. The stimulation that a baby receives from its mother is of crucial importance in developing the baby's sensory capacities and personality traits. And some conservative commentators suggest that the separation of mother and child - at an early age - can have serious long-term consequences including increased aggression levels.<sup>13</sup>

It should also be emphasised that the nature of pregnancy and child rearing has helped to shape the traditional role divisions within the family unit. Patricia Lanca<sup>14</sup>, writing in *The Salisbury Review*, offers a philosophical and historical account of the separation of roles. Human babies and young children require a long period of nurture and support before they can fend for themselves. In a form of



the state of nature argument, Lanca claims that mothers would have required the protection of male mates to defend them from other men and animals, and to provide food for them. In pre-industrial societies the chief ability of women was to produce and care for children. Any additional work would be based around the immediacy of the home. Men, lacking the ability to bare children, went out to find food or undertake physical work.

Lanca argues that it is from women's physical nature that we derive the previously strict enforcement of sexual morality, especially pre-marital virginity. A young healthy women is capable of baring children once a year. With the lack of effective contraception, a woman who became pregnant by an uncommitted partner would leave herself, and possibly her family, open to financial and social ruin. There was also a danger for both sexes from sexually transmitted diseases, as the ability to treat these successfully is relatively modern. The only real defence against them was chastity before marriage, and fidelity during it.

Marriage and the family has other consequences. It tempers the aggressiveness and sexual predatory nature that some conservatives see as inherent in men.<sup>15</sup> Men are constrained by the social rules and conventions of marriage, and develop responsibilities towards their wives. They are even conditioned by the moral jokes and myths of marriage such as being "tied to the apron strings"; it reinforces the role of the woman in the relationship with her authority achieved through the position that she has in the relationship, not through any achievement. Men are willing to work hard, often in boring jobs, to provide for their families and to gain pleasure from them. hence they become disciplined and achieve self-respect.

The nuclear family is also well suited to raising children,

not just in their early years but also as they grow older. Within the family they are exposed to both genders and can learn and be nurtured by both. They experience a set of moral values and are subject to authority which they obey because of its status within the family, not through an act of choice. They learn about the non-contractual obligations they have to other members of the family, and achieve a sense of identity not based on their own immediate perceptions but on a sense of uniformity and continuity over time reflected in the continuum of the family. This task of raising children is not without difficulty; a difficulty which is eased when shared by two people rather than by a single parent. Two parents are also important in exposing the child to both genders. Hence the conservative will not support those people who claim that "the only real family is the mother and her baby. Everyone else is peripheral."<sup>16</sup> This is because such a position excludes half of humanity (male) from child rearing.

The nuclear family has political consequences and is of importance for the development of society. The values learnt in the family are of crucial importance to the state. The respect for authority, the sense of belonging to something greater than one's own immediacy, and the sense of being part of a historical continuum are all values needed to produce good citizens and to help the state develop. Conservatives defend the importance of institutions and the value they have in contributing to the rational and moral development of the individual. Marriage is one such institution. It tempers as well the tendency towards individualism and the contractual approach to relationships that may spill over from our activities in work and business.<sup>17</sup>

A competing claim is made that whilst the family tempers excessive individualism, it is within the "bourgeois family" that values are inculcated which are necessary for



economic development. Hence the Marxian claim that capitalism produced the nuclear family is inverted, instead claiming that the family helped to create the conditions necessary for a capitalist economy. The development of moral consciousness and respect for authority, together with the desire to support one's family and promote its continuation produced workers and entrepreneurs with the desire to achieve more than was needed to facilitate their immediate needs. They established a home, which was private, and which they were responsible for its support and flourishing. Hence it is claimed by some conservative commentators that those countries which display limited or slow economic development lack the nuclear family structure.<sup>18</sup>

I now wish to examine the argument as to when the family started to go into decline, as well as trying to identify factors which have caused this state of affairs.

Many of the commentators identify the period of the 1960's as the important period where the traditional nuclear family had its normative position undercut. For example, conservatives present data arguing that the divorce rate did not exceed 1000 until 1914, and 10,000 until 1942. In 1971, over 100,000 petitions were filed in the first year of operation of the 1969 Divorce Reform Act. Now in Britain there are in excess of 150,000 divorces per year.<sup>19</sup> This period also saw a rise in the number of people living together before marriage. One survey publicised by the I.E.A. suggests that in 1966 2% of couples had lived together before marriage. This had raised to 7% by 1971, 19% by 1976, and by 1987 approximately 50% of couples had lived together before marriage. This tendency towards cohabitation is mirrored in the rise in illegitimate births. In the first fifty years of the century illegitimacy rates remained constant at around 4-5% of all



births. In 1961 6% of births were not to married couples. By 1971 it was 8%, and by 1981 it was 13%. By 1991 it had spiralled to 32% of births, with never married lone mothers forming a larger group than households headed by a divorced mother.<sup>20</sup>

Some writers have argued that this relative decline of the family should not particularly concern us but reflects the dynamic nature of the family; it is not declining only changing. This point will be discussed later when considering the apparent consequences of the "changing nature" of the family. Others have claimed that what it really illustrates is that the idea of a "golden age" of the family is a chimera, and that with the "liberation" of certain groups, especially women, and the deconstruction of myths about the harmony of family relationships, the nuclear family has been revealed in its true colours. That it is patriarchal, oppressive, exploitative and violent.

Dennis, writing in an I.E.A. report, challenges this view by questioning the grounds for these assertions. The statistics on convictions for eg crimes of violence against children, contradict such statements about family life in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. However these are disregarded by such academics as unreliable. If the refusal to accept such statistics is conceded then what is left is the accounts of family life provided by contemporary intellectuals and in some cases average people. If these accounts are rejected then what is the critic left to use as the basis of his evidence. As Dennis argues, if the family was such an oppressive institution why then were there so many popular social artifacts and accounts praising it. He concludes that the nature of the attack on the family is not one based on empirical evidence, but on political credentials.<sup>21</sup> This view I will discuss later in the Chapter.



Another line of attack directed at the family is that it has become the victim of capitalist economics. It is argued that market economics is dominated by rational choice as a means to satisfy individual immediate wants. Hence from the nineteenth century onwards the law of contract has increasingly pervaded into our social relationships, which have in turn become a mere satisfaction of our own desires. The rapid breakdown in family life during the 1980's reflects the stress placed on market economics by the Conservative Party under Margaret Thatcher.

This argument is challenged by many of the conservative commentators being examined. As was argued above, the nuclear family is defended as being of intrinsic importance in the development of capitalism. Dennis and Erdos point out that Britain was one of the first world economies to experience the development of industrialisation and the growth in factories and wage labour. Consequently Britain was exposed to the social deprivation that these brought with them in the form of disease, squalid living conditions and the abuse of labour. She was also the first to respond with laws to address these issues. Throughout this period, and up until the 1960's, the family remained a core institution in British society.<sup>22</sup> It is claimed that the figures on divorce do not reflect the true status of marriage, as divorce was difficult to obtain and financially penalised women. Yet the changes in divorce law in the latter half of the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth centuries did not produce the accompanying rise in petitions that was experienced during changes in the 1960's.<sup>23</sup>

Capitalist economies are also not about unbridled choice; they are not necessarily promiscuous. A consumer wishes to have a relationship of trust with the supplier, and vice versa. The transactions involved can be long-term, with on-going contact between both parties. We can come to trust

the integrity of the supplier and value the product we are purchasing. Similarly a supplier can value a particular customer and offer them preferential treatment. It should also be stated that within a market economy we are not dominated by choice and immediate want satisfaction. My choices are limited by logistical and financial considerations, but also on my concepts of value. I wish to purchase a particular object because it contributes a value to me and my life, often over a period of time.

It could be questioned whether or not the form of market economics promoted during the period of office of Margaret Thatcher did promote a more immediate response to consumption. Whatever the outcome of this debate it seem unlikely that her economic policies could have such an immediate consequence at the social level.

An allied charge labelled at capitalist economies is that their nature is responsive to consumer wishes, making planning difficult, and stable employment difficult to guarantee. This has an effect on marriage and rates of illegitimacy, as unemployed males are less financially attractive to females, and may lack self-esteem and the responsibility to support a wife and children.<sup>24</sup> Whilst this may be a factor in family breakdowns during particular periods and in areas of illegitimacy, it should not be overstated as an underlying cause of the general trend. Firstly it is argued that the trend in the decline of the family as a bedrock of the state came about during periods of low unemployment. And secondly, as Murray has highlighted, whilst there is a strong correlation between unemployment and illegitimacy, when unemployment drops in previous areas of high unemployment, it is not accompanied by corresponding drops in illegitimacy. Indeed the opposite can be true.<sup>25</sup>

It is not the capitalist or market economy per se that has



caused the breakdown in the family.

"What makes a relationship a market relationship is the emphasis on the *self-interest* of each of the parties - however much they might be of service to one another for a given period. Of course, the market only works when they believe they will be of service to one another."<sup>26</sup>

Dennis and Erdos claim that from the 1960's onwards there has been the growth of egotism as a philosophy of human motivation. Traditionally this has thought to be an offshoot of liberal economics, and they agree that there has been a rise in libertarian ideas fostering an egotistical disposition. However, they claim that the rise on the "right" has been mirrored by a comparable rise on the "left".

Traditionally the liberal places great emphasis on choice and autonomy in private actions, while valuing choice and contract in the social sphere. The state should only be permitted to intervene when there is harm caused to a third party. The libertarian ideas that have developed during the 1980's are even more sceptical of state intervention to prevent harm or regulate unintended consequences. Unlike economic liberals such as Smith and Hayek, they are unwilling to defend particular practices as an intrinsic good, but support the good being determined by choice. Such an approach leaves relationships open to choice and differing interpretations, lessening the importance of familial relationships.

On the other hand the socialist, according to Dennis and Erdos, is concerned with unintended consequences, and the results of actions. They traditionally want individuals to take responsibility for their actions, and for the state to intervene to limit the harm to other people. However, "egotistical socialists", as opposed to "ethical socialists", do not wish the state to intervene in matters regarding private\sexual morality; everything within this

area is a matter of choice and freedom. Within sexual morality there is no accountability or responsibility towards the consequences of one's action, i.e. children. Instead, the state, which cannot interfere in promoting moral virtue, can and must provide for the resultant mothers and children of the choice in sexual activity. Such an approach moves towards a market orientated view of sex, with the state left to pick up the casualties.

Hence, according to Dennis and Erdos, the liberal and the socialist are both abandoning one of the tenets of their theories, responsibility of the consequences for their actions. There is no obligation to children fathered; it is a matter for the state to provide care for these infants, regardless of the cost that may be incurred to the child. Similarly women may choose to have a child by a man they do not wish to have a long-term relationship with, just because it is something that they want. The child is not an end in itself but an object to be obtained by a woman to fit in with her lifestyle needs. While some form of individualism is of benefit to a human person,

"It is an entirely different matter when in sexual conduct the cast of mind is that I please myself, but if anything goes wrong, you must be responsible that my children come to no harm. In effect such a biological father is saying, "You must be a socialist so that I can be an egoist. My baby is the hostage through whom I, who will not do my duty, will hold you to your duty." It is the ultimate corruption of both individualistic and socialistic ideals. But it is the greater betrayal of the latter: it is egoistic socialism"<sup>27</sup>

It is important to consider how this culture of egotism has come about. Dennis and Erdos argue that it has been fostered by marxian theorists, seeking to subvert the existing social order. As was mentioned above, Marxists argue that the structure of the family is determined by the means of production. Those theorists who support the "changing not deteriorating argument" about the family are



following in Marx's footsteps. With changing methods of production there has been a change in the types of labour needed. Present production methods require women "because they are cheaper and more tractable". Hence there will be a growth in mother headed households as they will not require the burden of fathers in addition to looking after children. As economic production methods change again, so to will family types. Thus the idea of inevitability with the process, and the reluctance to make a stand to challenge what is happening.<sup>28</sup>

Another form of Marxian analysis is a direct consequence of student movements of the 1960's. These people were influenced by Marcuse and other members of the Frankfurt school. Such theorists no longer believed that revolution would emanate from the proletariat, as they had been weakened by capitalist concessions. Revolution would come from those groups threatening the tradition structure of society, eg students, homosexuals, the sexually liberated. These groups would challenge the state, and in so doing show up its corrupt nature. Similarly, those who followed the theories of Trotsky sought to destabilise the existing social structure by attacking component parts of it.<sup>29</sup>

In Dennis and Erdos' view statements about the oppressive nature of the family have been fostered by groups who actively seek to subvert the present structure. These ideas have been promoted successfully because many of the students involved in the protest movements of the 1960's have become involved in the mass media during the 1970's and 1980's and now hold reasonably high ranking positions. Thus they have had open access to the means of creating an anti-family ethos. Other people, especially women have made use of these ideas within feminist thinking. And it is the stance of feminism towards the nuclear family that I now wish to examine.

For conservatives, the growth in feminist ideology was, it is argued, in many ways initiated by the New Left experience of the 1960's. In America in the 1970's feminists began talking about "conscious raising" among women, and about the "group experience". During the 1960's and 1970's more women began entering higher education and employment, and their presence and arguments helped to raise bars to the professions. Taylor argues that the focus of self-fulfilment for women was also challenged, with the natural progression into marriage and the family competing with ideas about work and careers. These changes in the rights of employment of women were mirrored in social legislation, and the role of women within marriage. Hence the issue of wife-beating, marital rape and incest were openly discussed, and changes in the law announced. Rape was redefined as a crime of violence. Also during this period many countries changed their ruling on abortion.<sup>30</sup>

The conservative author Taylor identifies two strands within the feminist movement: individualistic feminism and relational feminism.<sup>31</sup> Individualistic feminism is essentially a liberal idea about individual worth, autonomy and individual rights. It defends equal rights for both sexes and the equal opportunity of employment practices. Relational feminism wishes to relate the role and rights of women to that of men. It wishes to emphasis women's distinct contribution in society and makes claims in lieu of this. Women are a group that have been oppressed, and can hence form an interest group making claims based on this premise. Lanca claims that this latter strand of feminism draws its theoretical underpinning from the work of Marx and Engels.

Lanca argues that for Marx and Engels the relation between the sexes is of a class based nature. That the first division of labour was between man and women for child-breeding, with the first class antagonism based on the



oppression of woman by man. The nuclear family involved the suppression of the woman's rights by man, enslaving her and making her the instrument of the man's lust. Hence the move from a matriarchal to a patriarchal society.<sup>32</sup> Lanca claims that this approach produces five key tenants of feminism. Firstly, that the exclusion of women from the public sphere in favour of the private sphere is a deprivation of rights, imposed by discrimination and violence, and that this was reflected in their secondary status in law. Thirdly, the importance of female virginity was created by men as part of their desire to own women and the means of procreation. Fourthly, men have developed ways of indoctrinating women into the gender roles that suit men. And fifthly, men have deliberately excluded women from history.<sup>33</sup>

From this Marxian inspired position many feminists are openly hostile to the family and actively seek to undermine it. Women's opposition to marriage is not just a "lifestyle choice", but is part of establishing an "oppositional culture". Hence the comment of Fran Bennett, Director of the Child Poverty Action Group, that an income for mothers as right may help to "undermine the different family responsibilities of both sexes", and thus create the desirable situation whereby "the woman might no longer feel dependent on the men, and the men might no longer want to provide for their wives and children." Similarly, Sue Slipman, Director of the National Council for One Parent Families, fears measures that would promote two parent families, whereby women are put under the control of men.<sup>34</sup>

These reported feminist views on the family have been given greater importance, conservatives argue, by the role of the European Union directives on equal employment policies, and the work of the Equal Opportunities Commission. Hence the ideas of sharing financial resources within the family is under attack as a social problem requiring actions to address the problem of "income dependency". Conservatives

claim that other studies wish to examine whether or not the woman has enough income to leave the relationship. Indeed, income from a partner is deemed less reliable than income from the state, and is seen as impoverishing and oppressive. Yet, as Morgan points out, the real problem of economic dependency for women is not the relationship with men per se, but children. Women can perform and earn as much as men if there are no children around. Therefore for the feminist there must be a way of liberating women from child care.<sup>35</sup>

Feminist views on child care are influenced by the work of Engels, when he claimed that the early stages of human history involved promiscuity and communal provision, with no father knowing his child, and no child its father. Hence the feminist requires the state to provide support for mothers and child rearing facilities, with men making financial contributions to this central pot.<sup>36</sup> This process is described by some as the construction of the matriarchal state. This position does appear almost contradictory for feminists for while they are attacking the father as an instrument of violence and oppression, the services they require are turning the state into a father. Similarly, feminists often praise the love and affection between mother and child, and defend its value, yet they are willing to entrust child care to paid workers.

The view of the oppressive nature of the patriarchal family has come under attack from commentators on the right. Kenny claims that far from the family being patriarchal it is in fact matriarchal, equally serving the interests of women, especially in their desire for motherhood and family creation. The result of its decline has been a social dislocation that has failed to serve women's interests.<sup>37</sup> I now wish to examine how, in such a relatively short space of time, anti-family views have gained such prominence in public debate and opinion forming groups.



In the conservative thesis being outlined above on the decline of the family, it is claimed that the trends in the decline of the family can be traced back to the 1960's. It has already been discussed how, during this period, New Left or neo-marxist ideas than began to come to prominence, and how these ideas became disseminated among the rising number of mainly middle-class students. During this period as well there was a growth in an independent and individualistic youth culture. This appeared partly because of increasing wealth among western countries, and was precipitated by anti-war and anti-racist sentiment, together with the fear of total destruction by nuclear weapons. These issues were essentially trans-national, and their discussion and heightened public awareness symbolised a change in the nature of the type and methods of information that were available to individual people. It was facilitated by the development of communication technology and ushered in a whole new information style via the television media.

Norman Dennis supports Wright Mills assertion that in complex societies we are all forced to live in "second-hand worlds". The information we receive is fed to us by people who have access to the appropriate information channels, who in turn control the channels of persuasion which influence our decisions and moral stances on a range of subjects of which we have no direct experience. The role of the intellectual was to define the facts of past, present and future events, and also to define the appropriate moral response<sup>38</sup>. On this methodological approach the task of the sociologist is to understand and interpret. Its "scientific" methods are designed to eradicate as far as possible the tendency to believe what one wishes at the time. Such an approach is in conflict with the Marxian approach of social causation. Within this methodology it is not the consciousness of human beings that determine their social arrangement, but the social arrangement and its

economic base that determine their consciousness. Hence what we feel and perceive, and what we think may be the real causes of our actions may be the consequence of false consciousness. The task of the intellectual is to peel back the surface layers to expose the reality of the dynamics and conflict of power.

The approach of the Marxian intellectual has, as was mentioned above, had effects on the historical role of the family. The family has been attacked as an oppressive and violent institution, serving the needs of men. The approach is always carried out by the expert, in a "scientific" presentation of his facts. And if empirical data and contemporary accounts do not provide the evidence needed to reinforce the claim then the false consciousness of the people expressing counter claims can always be brought to bear.

The nature of debate in contemporary societies is now dominated by a media which undermines the common sense approach to problem solving. People are asked to make comments and value judgements on more and more issues of which they have no direct experience, and consequently lack the practical knowledge to make informed moral judgements. Hence they are subject to being provided with loaded information and offered the "correct" interpretation and moral attitude. The way that issues are presented is always deemed to be a rational use of available facts. The idea of mass debate allows no dialogue or challenging of the expert; we take what is given. It lacks the interactive nature of social debate, where theses are challenged and we are forced to relate the issue being discussed to our own experiences and values.

This form of issue style presentation is facilitated by a media that requires a subject-problem-answer to fit an appropriate sound-byte. Hence it is an ideal vehicle for



shaping and changing public opinion, as issues are not openly debated. It also provides a need for those "intellectuals" who have the appropriate expertise and style to present a case with a mass appeal style. This need creates a further dilemma for the traditional values of society. Dennis, following Schumpeter's work, claims that the intellectual, by the nature of his occupation, tends to examine what is going on around him, "desacrilising" the values of society in the process, and eventually undercutting the base of the society he finds himself situated in.<sup>39</sup> The recent comments of Edward Said about the role of the intellectual in disrupting the current consensus give credence to this view.<sup>40</sup>

The growth in the importance of the media has led to competition for customers, with an increase in demand for entertainment, especially generated by sensation. Hence the challenging of existing values is a sacred cow ripe for slaughter. The family has been one institution for attack. Even the traditional defender of family morality, Woman's Hour, on Radio 4 was happy to broadcast in 1992 the views of a contributor who claimed that marriage was an insult and turned the woman into a legal prostitute. The change in opinion on the family is perhaps reflected by the fact that such a broadcast caused such a limited furore. Indeed, when the Vice President of the United States criticised the character of an unmarried mother in a popular American series, he was subject to much criticism<sup>41</sup>. This point perhaps reflects almost a contradiction in some areas of the media, as feminist causes have themselves almost become a taboo that cannot be challenged<sup>42</sup>. However, the media desire for an audience is such that even the new taboos are starting to be challenged.

Since the 1960's television has become of increasing importance within the daily lives of people. Increasingly programme makers have become more challenging to the



traditional family morality, endorsing varieties of sexual lifestyle based on choice, displaying sexual promiscuity as normal, and indulging in ever more explicit sex scenes. To those people growing up and dominated by television for entertainment, establishing a code of sexual virtues based on any thing other than hedonistic sexual pleasure must be extremely difficult<sup>43</sup>. Added to this is the influence of popular music, some of which includes explicit references to sex and violence, in order to shock and make profits for multinational companies.

Many of those people who are opposed to the family have also made successful use of the media in promoting the values of pressure groups that they support\head. The slickness of media presentation has become a key factor in fronting interest groups. The manner in which these groups operate has also allowed them to become advisors to government. For example, many conservatives were opposed to the anti-AIDS campaign that was supported by the government, claiming that it turned sexual ethics into "a matter of putting rubber on an organ before inserting it into an orifice."<sup>44</sup> To some extent the style of the campaign and the money made available was a response to the successful lobbying of government by AIDS pressure groups, many of which were associated with the media as a profession. In a similar manner people such as Polly Toynbee and Claire Rayner, who both support diversity in families, are regular broadcasters, while Sue Slipman, Director of the National Council for One Parent Families, sits on a number of committees, including an advisory committee for the Secretary of State for the Department of Employment<sup>45</sup>.

The growth of mass, complex societies, within which the priority of information is associated with the "scientific", media competent intellectual has helped to foster the growth in the philosophical idea of post-

modernism and deconstruction. Within these doctrines human beings cannot claim a fixed identity, nor is there a moral priority in actions. In the arts, the demand for audiences and markets has lead to the need of authors to shock and appeal to more base human instincts such as voyeurism. Hence there has developed a culture challenging established norms and moral identity. Intellectuals have reinforced this process by adopting and promoting such works within academic courses. In a similar manner it is claimed that the teaching of the virtues within schools and universities has been replaced with courses in moral dilemmas. These may be interesting to discuss, but by their very nature they are dilemmas, which will not provide readily available solutions. They do not encourage the development of moral character, instead ushering in versions of moral relativism.<sup>46</sup>

Hence it is argued that since the 1960's there has been a growth in individualism and hedonistic pleasure. This has been caused by a number of factors including the re-emergence of ideologies seeking to challenge traditional morality, the increasing prosperity of Western Nations, and the growth of the mass media, especially television. I now wish to examine how these factors have helped influence changes in the divorce law, before going on to look at how Conservative Governments have responded to the challenges made against the family in the 1980's and 1990's.

The change in divorce law under the 1969 Divorce Law Reform Act effectively brought in no fault divorce in Britain, and seemed in essence to reflect the growing ethos of egotism. Defenders of the law change claimed that it would not increase divorce, as the law did not determine the moral nature of marriage only legally regulate it. It would help free people from unhappy marriages, while at the same time lessen the rates of illegitimate births and unmarried cohabitation as extra-marital affairs would no longer be



necessary. The opposite results proved to be true.

When the law was changed the nature of the union it was regulating changed as well. Marriage was viewed as a provisional arrangement, which could be left if the relationship became difficult. It was also viewed as an arrangement or base from which better options could be sought. Consequently its appeal as an institution lessened. This undermining of its importance is reinforced by those who experience divorce.<sup>47</sup>

Since 1969, adaptations to divorce law have been designed to secure financial assistance for the spouses and dependants of children. There has not been a commitment to attempting to alter the law to halt the rise in divorces. Indeed the Law Commission has questioned whether marriage serves any useful purpose, and whether it should be supported as a legal institution. And the 1993 Government Green Paper "Looking to the Future: Mediation and the Grounds for divorce", proposed that divorce proceedings may be commenced without the formal statement of any reasons, and that after twelve months the final decree can be issued, giving the parties enough time to sort out the practical arrangements of divorce.<sup>48</sup>

Marriage as an institution has been challenged by the above changes. No longer is it viewed as a vow, but instead it is seen as another life-style choice where a contract is made between individuals. However, the problem in Britain is, as Barry points out, that marriage is neither a vow or a contract<sup>49</sup>. Marriage as a vow implies a solemn and binding commitment, sanctioned by canon or civil law, which creates a higher moral unit with collective moral responsibility. Such a position is at odds with the idea of personal moral choice. It is also at odds with the idea of marriage as a contract. The idea of marriage as a contract has become popular because of its association with individualism and



choice; a contract can be terminated by the parties contracting to it with no judgement of third parties.

However the present legal situation does not support marriage as a contract. This is because the liberal idea of contract involves discussions of blame and justice when breaking the terms of the agreement, and requires a sense of responsibility for actions. The present legal system wishes to remove ideas of blame as grounds for dissolving marriage and for establishing the circumstances after divorce. It also does not reinforce the principle of responsibility for actions, instead demanding that the state should provide for the parties after divorce via the benefit system. Hence changes in the role of law and the state in divorce mirror Dennis and Erdos' thesis about the rise in egotism.

The definition of marriage as a contract was criticised and rejected by Hegel. For Hegel the concept of marriage is related to the family, whereas contract is what governs civil society. These are different moments or parts in the ethical life. Marriage and contract do have the same origins in the *arbitrary will of the person*,<sup>50</sup> however they differ in their purpose. Within a contract two independent people come together through property relations and agree to perform an action, for example, to exchange or borrow property. At the end of the transaction they are still independent, retaining their individual self-consciousness. Marriage is different. When I desire and experience love I acknowledge that I no longer wish to be an independent person in my own right; that I feel incomplete on my own. When I experience love I find myself in another person, gaining recognition in this person, who in turn gains recognition in me.<sup>51</sup> Coming together in marriage is the ethical realization of love, whereby individual personalities are given up to form a union and *substantial end*. Marriage differs from contract because of this ethical

end. Rather than contractual values it embodies the values of piety. Hegel states that because of the *religious character* of marriage legislation governing divorce should make dissolution difficult, thus favouring "the right of ethics against caprice."<sup>52</sup>

The concept of contract is now pervading all areas of life, with the notion of consent assuming the status of a moral principle. Marriage will be detrimentally affected by this concept as it does not fit easily into the idea of a contract. This is because the union of marriage and the provisions required involve long-term commitment, and can produce consequences which cannot be forecast, eg the birth of a handicapped child will make demands on the parents of a marriage that could not be envisaged at the time of marriage. Similarly the union involves emotional commitment and dependency that are difficult to quantify and hence asses for purposes of a settlement during the breakdown of a marriage.

If marriage is perceived in purely contractual terms then there is the additional question as to the relationship between parents and children. And again there seems to be the demand that the relationship between children and their parents is verging on a contractual one, with children possessing rights and rational individuality from birth. Dennis claims that the role of the parents has been described by Lord Scarman as little more than advice, with parents having dwindling rights over children which, in clashes of interests, the courts would be hesitant to enforce. This issue came to prominence during the Gillick case when a mother challenged the right of a doctor to prescribe contraceptives to her under-age daughter without the mother's knowledge. This approach again appears to be fostering ideas of personal choice without responsibility, as the parents, and state, will be forced to respond and meet any unintended consequences and problems<sup>53</sup>.



The Conservative Party has traditionally been a defender of family values, and would consequently appear to be the ideal counter to the challenges to the family that have been outlined above. However, conservatives outside the machinations of government have claimed that "in the very decade the traditional family needed support, government - Conservative Government - failed it."<sup>54</sup> Statements from various members of Government have seemed to give credence to this claim. For example Virginia Bottomley has claimed that families are one "private thing" among others, and hence the obligations between members are no more than the obligations between a person and the object of any choice. And the present Chancellor, Kenneth Clarke has declared that the decision for a mother to go out to work or stay at home and look after her children is just a "personal choice" based on the financial circumstances of her family. A decision similar to deciding what type of car to buy.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, the defending of family values appears to be at odds with what Kenneth Clarke assumes to be the role of government; that of "day to day realities" in expedience and placating the demands of interest groups.<sup>56</sup> Not only have Conservative administrations failed to provide the rhetoric of support for marriage and the nuclear family, they have also brought in policies, especially relating to the economy and tax that have helped to weaken its position.

When the Conservative Party was elected to government in 1979, they brought with them an economic philosophy that prioritised the controlling of inflation as the primary objective of economic policy. The importance of maintaining full employment was relegated or seen as the natural consequence of a low inflation economy. Hence the significance of full-time male employment for family life was seen as a peripheral matter and treated with some ambivalence. According to conservative critics this has allowed the "feminist lobby" to gain influence in decision



making, and helped to promote the transfer of state resources in the direction of single families. The government has also responded to demands to get more women into the workforce by pursuing equal opportunities policies, and by providing financial incentives to lone parents. eg there is to be a £40 "earnings disregard" for the child care of those lone parents on Family Credit, equating out to an extra £28 per week, meeting the demands of Sue Slipman, Director of the National Council for One Parent Families.<sup>57</sup> These policies do not take into account the effect absent parents will have on the development, or lack of it, for dependent children.

During the 1980's and 1990's there has been what has been described as the increasing "feminisation of the state", replacing the initial "state patriarchy". The state is increasingly taking over the role for providing for predominantly female lone parents. They are no longer dependant on the fathers of their children, instead making claims based on rights, against the state. Men contribute financially, via the state bureaucracy, and hence have no control over the exercise of the finances. This is in accordance with many feminist writers and pressure groups. For example Polly Toynbee wishes the state to "shape a society that makes a place for women and children as family units, self-sufficient and independent" if they are not to "suffer needlessly".<sup>58</sup> This role for the state can be seen in policies such as the Children Act 1989, whereby the state takes on a proactive role in child care, rather than a reactive one, providing resources for the welfare of children, rather than supporting the family unit. It can also be seen in the work of the Child Support Agency (CSA), which, after initial scepticism, has been increasingly supported by feminists, as it is another part of the state machinery that can help to provide an income for women and contribute to their independence, while reducing the influence and direct involvement of the father in the

rearing of his children.

A similar policy that has come under increasing pressure group attack is the married couples tax allowance. The National Children's Home has suggested the phasing out of the married couples allowance, instead giving the money to families with children. This view has support from the present Chancellor, who has described the allowance as an "anomaly".<sup>59</sup> The allowance was frozen at its 1990-91 level, it was lowered in April 1994 to the 20% tax rates from the main 25% and 40% levels. In 1995\96 it will be cut to the 15% rate of tax, with a view to phasing it out altogether. This change has come on top of increasing tax pressure on families related to such policies as increasing national insurance contributions, the growth of local taxation whereby couples pay more than lone adults, and the addition of VAT on fuel. Indeed there has been a growth in two parent families among the poorest groups, and a rise in working poor couples. This fact is ignored by the media who promotes the cause of lone parent poverty. Families with children made up 49% of the bottom 10% of income distribution in 1991, with lone parents making up 11%.<sup>60</sup>

Thus right-wing critics of the Conservative Government point to economic policy and changes in the tax laws, together with changes in divorce law to justify their view that Conservatives have abandoned the family. They have instead responded to the demands of interests groups seeking to challenge the nuclear family, endorsing the idea of choice in sexual preference and the diversity of family forms.

If the decline in the family is something to be alarmed by, as its conservative supporters claim it is, then the increased number of divorces, and the growth in never married mothers, should be having detrimental effects to those it is directly affecting, and to society at large. It



is the consequences of the decline in the nuclear family that I now wish to examine.

For the adults involved, the breaking up of the nuclear household has many logistical and physical consequences. One area of importance is in housing. The growth of women in the workforce, and the increase in two earner families was a contributing factor to the rise in house prices that took place during the 1980's. This contributes to financial difficulties when a woman wishes to give up work to have a family. There has also been a demand placed on housing stock caused by the growth of people living on their own, either as a result of a breakdown of a marriage or because they have no wish to get married. In Great Britain single person households are growing faster than other combinations, comprising 12% of all households in 1961, rising to 26% in 1991, with the fastest growth among people under pensionable age.<sup>61</sup>

The fact that more people are living alone immediately breaks familial ties, with a lack of relatives available to look after and support individuals. This has led, and will increasingly lead, to demands for support on the state. Nor does it seem that living alone is particularly good for the individual. Research has shown that areas with the highest divorce rates correspond to high suicide rates. This rate is particularly pronounced for men, who appear to be badly affected by their loss of a role and responsibility associated with the family.<sup>62</sup> An associated problem for males is that young men who do not become drawn into family responsibilities, while having access to sexual relations with women, lose a socialising and disciplining input on their nature, and continue to act in an aggressively hedonistic manner.

Cohabitation does not seem to answer the problems of marriage breakdown. Research in America has shown that couples who married after living together had a divorce



rate one third higher after ten years than married couples who had not lived together. Women who cohabit are also five times more likely to suffer violence at the hands of a partner than a married woman. Cohabitation appears to signify a lack of long-term commitment and investment of resources

If the consequences of divorce and lone parenthood are not good for the adults concerned the consequences for children are even worse. For example, Dennis cites one report which claims that when marriages break down 40% of children experience behavioural problems, of which 25% have long-term problems. The problems included anxiety, withdrawal, and, in teenagers, hostility. Where the father had not been involved with the children, they experienced more difficulties than the children of two parent families, and other single parent families.<sup>63</sup>

Carlson, in an I.E.A. report, claims that research in North America has shown that the absence of a two parents, or the introduction of a step parent can cause major problems with children. They are more likely to become involved in drug abuse, and to achieve less in education, or enter higher education. Educational achievements are also undercut if both parents enter the labour market, and one survey has suggested that a mother in full-time employment has a negative relationship to children's comprehension, concentration, retention skills, language and ability to work independently. Where the family is broken, and/or there is a step-parent present the incidence of child abuse increase dramatically. A study conducted by McMaster University suggested that pre-school children living with one natural and one step-parent were forty times more likely to be abused than similar children living with two natural parents. Another study has made the claim that child abuse is declining in intact US families.<sup>64</sup>

Morgan claims that research in Britain comes up with similar results. For example unemployment rates are higher for children from single parent households, they are more likely to leave home before the age of nineteen, and are likely to be earning less money by the age of 26. A middle-class child who experiences divorce is half as likely to go to university as his counter-part from an intact family, while a girl who had experienced her parents divorce was less likely to have any educational qualifications. Morgan claims that research has also shown that the children of divorce are downwardly mobile, being less likely to marry, more likely to divorce and, in the case of females more likely to become lone parents. Divorce is also detrimental to the health of children. There is also the tendency for children, whose parent is dependent on welfare payments, continuing the cycle of dependency.<sup>65</sup>

Conservatives such as Dennis claim that if a child has parents that divorce, with step-parents introduced, or lives in a home with transient adults, he loses the sense of security and solidity that comes with a settled home. There are no longer familiar relationships and family traditions which provide reassurance for a child. Nor does he have the chance to become inculcated with the moral values associated with the family. Instead he turns to values from his peers, which may in certain areas all share his experiences. Dennis and Erdos identify whole groups of such children who are alienated from the communal and social values of society. Such youths reject dominant culture, instead adopting the values of their immediate group. These are essentially the values of negation, with anything held in reverence or respect attacked and ridiculed. These children and youths, as identified in a study looking at behaviour in certain areas of Sunderland, are in a situation of anomie; "alienated people sharing and sanctioning the absence of socially-orientated values." Any values that they do not approve of or create are



oppressive. Hence there is a resistance to being told what to do, and many of such groups are unemployed, or unemployable. Such a situation is inherently violent, as the riots on the Meadow Well estate shows, with violence being revered.<sup>66</sup>

The detrimental effect that broken homes can have on dependent children would appear to be supported by statistical evidence, and by the "common sense" approach to knowledge and reasoning. As Dennis states, many people in Sunderland share sympathy with lads who have never known, and been proud of, their fathers.<sup>67</sup> With regards to statistical evidence, Dennis and Erdos claim that

"the case that the family was not deteriorating only changing, so far as children were concerned not only flew in the face of common experience. It also flew in the face of every empirical study that had ever been published on the subject that had yielded definite results on the benefits and drawbacks for children of families with fathers as compared with those households without them."<sup>68</sup>

The important point to note is that the claim is not being made that all fatherless children do badly at school etc. Some achieve exactly the same results as children from a family with two parents. The claim is that the average distribution is such that they do worse than the latter.

Despite the evidence many intellectuals question the validity of the research, and/or the conclusions drawn from it. A journalist, Melanie Phillips, after hearing a social scientist denounce the above claim asked him to provide his research evidence backing his assertions. This he was unable to do, as there was no such research. Instead he retreated into an ideological defence questioning the priority of children's rights over parents.<sup>69</sup>

The effects of lone parenthood and marriage break-down are not confined to those immediate family members experiencing



the situation. Britain, like many Western countries, has experienced a rapid growth in its crime rate during the latter part of the twentieth century, and many social scientists are claiming that there is a correlation between these rates of crime and the growth of the egotistical and anti-family culture. Research in America has concluded that a city's divorce rate is a better predictor of the robbery rate than the rates of arrest and the length of punishment terms. Another survey found that the percentage of single-parent households with children between the ages of 12-20 has a direct correlation with the rates of violent crime and burglary. In Britain single-parent households are more likely to be targets of crime, but also the neighbours of such households are more likely to be affected by crime than if they live next door to two-parent households.<sup>70</sup>

In 1955, the crime rate in Britain had just broken the rate of 1,000 crimes per 100,000 of the population. This is a rise of just over a 100% on the figures for the middle of the nineteenth century. By 1960 it had risen to 1,700 crimes per 100,000. Though the 1960's, which was a period of low unemployment, the rate expanded enormously. By 1970 it was up to 3,200 crimes per 100,000 of the population, by 1980, 5,100 per 100,000. The rate was 7,300 per 100,000 in 1985, and in 1991 it was 10,000 per 100,000. On average, at the beginning of the century, 84,000 crimes were reported annually in England and Wales. At the beginning of the 1990's, in the West End of Newcastle, 13,500 crimes were reported. Some commentators have questioned the rate of rise of crime, claiming that part of it is a result of people reporting crimes which they would not in the past have done, together with different approaches in Police methods. One such report was conducted by the British Crime Survey (BCS). Many of their claims can be contested. Yet even on their figures there were, in 1987, an estimated 13 million crimes against individuals and their property. The rates of rise in crime were also extensive during the

period 1981-1987, eg burglary with loss went up 39%, theft from motor vehicles went up 36%.<sup>71</sup>

There are many attempts to try and explain the growth in crime. One argument is that it is related to growing affluence, and the rise in the amount of goods available to be stolen. Yet the percentage rises in crime during the 1980's do not correspond to the rise in consumer goods. Other claims relate to poverty and unemployment. Dennis and Erdos discuss this claim when examining the causes of the Meadow Well riots in North Tyneside in 1991. Such an area has a history of unemployment and social deprivation. In the 1920's and 1930's this not cause riots or high crime. However, compared to these periods the present young people have better housing conditions, better leisure and educational facilities, more state benefits and increased chances of employment. What they did lack, according to Dennis and Erdos, is a sense of social discipline and attachment to families that their predecessors possessed. Rioters have to choose to riot, and this implies a shared set of values permitting it. There was no sense of disgrace to one's family or undermining one's moral role as a father and husband. They were part of an alienated community, whose moral precepts are immediate and egotistical.<sup>72</sup>

Within areas such as Meadow Well the nuclear family has broken down, with many children having little or no contact with their fathers. This can have a devastating effect on the children, especially the male. No longer do they have a role model to work from and to learn the ethics of being a husband and father. Instead there is a tendency to wish to develop the more basic male attributes of power and conquest, without learning about social control and responsibility. Men lose a sense of being needed in the family and in the rearing of children. This process has been accelerated during the 1980's and 1990's by increased financial provision for lone-mothers, lessening the need



for a male input. Hence such a situation can lead to the creation of a "warrior class", whereby there is a separation of economic activity from collective family use, and where money is achieved in an illegitimate manner. Within such a class, status is determined by violence and sexual conquest. This analysis has lead some commentators to claim that there will be major political changes needed to meet these social demands. In effect there will be a police state to control males, and a welfare state to provide for mothers and children.<sup>73</sup>

These changes in family life have additional consequences for morality, altering the way the sexes view each other. For the un-socialised male the woman becomes merely an object of sexual gratification and provider of other necessities. On the Meadow Well estate traditionally the family house was called home, and the wife "our lass". Young men now refer to their female partner as "the bitch" and their house as "the Kennel". The women view the men as "selfish violent and weak". Hence there is no real desire to become permanently involved with one. The ideal of life improvement is to get a good job with a steady boyfriend, marriage and a family. However, the vast majority realise that this is not going to happen, and instead seek to gain status by becoming pregnant and having a child. The acquisition of benefits this status incurs is a factor in their decision. However, the status associated with having a baby is of far more significance. By being able to present a healthy and well looked after baby they are making a statement about their own well-being and ability to cope.<sup>74</sup> A study of teenage pregnancies in Tayside between 1980 and 1990, found that a girl from the poorest areas of Tayside was six times more likely to have a child than from the most affluent areas.<sup>75</sup>

This lack of family socialisation and responsibility has detrimental effects on the employment prospects of men.



Young men learn from their parents attitudes towards work and economic self-sufficiency. In a welfare culture this form of inculcation is missing, with the right to welfare replacing the ethos of supporting oneself. If they do not form a stable relationship with wives and families they again do not cultivate the desire to provide for their family. Lacking a structured life and having a rebellious attitude to authority makes such youths difficult to employ. Murray cites the example of a refurbishment project in Easterhouse in Glasgow. Thirty local young men applied for jobs, thirteen were accepted, ten came to work on the first day, and by the end of the week only one was still coming to work.<sup>76</sup> Hence, undermining the family unit does in principle challenge the economic base of the country.

Many of the critics of the conservative stance on the family will claim that many of the problems are due to the economic position of lone mothers; that if we attack poverty then the detrimental effects on children will disappear. A survey by the Department of Social Security in 1991 showed that 73% of lone mothers depended on income support. Of this group only 28% had been in regular full-time work before their lone parenting situation had developed.<sup>77</sup> Indeed, much of the feminist support for the CSA has been based around the plan to receive contributions from fathers in addition to state payments. The fact that lone mothers will have financial difficulties does seem to agree with a common sense approach to their status. Two parents are potentially able to generate more wealth through working, especially if one concentrates on a career while the other takes on the bulk of child care responsibilities. Similarly a single mother will have increased demands on her time and will consequently be less able to concentrate on her career. Surrogate fathers and boyfriends are also less likely to make financial commitments to children that are not their own, especially when there is no legal tie to the mother. Studies suggest

that increased income would certainly help the physical well-being of children in lone-mother households.

However, the above reasons for the lack of financial security for these families does appear to be a de facto consequence of lone-parenthood and hence a reason why it should not be presented as a viable option. If you have a child without the support of a father, the likelihood is that you will become financially impoverished. The argument that more money should be given, via welfare payments, to lone mothers can be challenged from a number of positions. It can be questioned why they should receive more money and not other groups, eg the elderly. The claims for extra funding from a limited budget would prove to be difficult to prioritise and satisfy. As has been argued above, the way a family operates is of major consequence in the inculcation of values in dependent children. If a family is dependent on the state for its financial resources, then this will have an effect on the perception of the state and motivation for work of children. This negative effect has been noted in the USA, and in the former Soviet Union.<sup>78</sup> If more state help is provided in helping women back into the workplace, then this too can be detrimental as there is increased pressure on the mother, and less time spent with children.

Nor is finance the only factor in the under-achieving and increased social problems of children from broken and mother headed house-holds. Morgan argues that research has shown that low\under achievement in education is more closely related to single-parenthood than factors related to parents race, class, education or income. Similar correlations exist with regards to becoming a single mother, becoming pregnant before the age of twenty, getting divorced, becoming unemployed. Such household can produce an emotionally unstable environment for children to grow-up in, and can repeat the values of egotistical behaviour and



state dependency on their off-spring.<sup>79</sup>

The overall consequence of the demise of the nuclear family and the growth of lone-parenthood is a change in the nature of the state, and its relationship to its citizens. The family, as a private institution for the upbringing and welfare of children, and the care and support of its members, has lost its autonomy and its ability to perform its function. The state is intervening to provide facilities and resources. At the same time the state is resisted in making any moral claims over the type of family structure to be promoted. This relationship produces increasing demands on the state in the form of the rights of the citizen. Yet there is an absence in reciprocal duties. What is being produced is a "client society", with limited conceptions of civic duty. An individualistic conception of human flourishing is offered whereby our needs are met by an array of state employees, guided by managers and experts, and in which familial ties and obligations play an insignificant role.

This role for the state is viewed by conservatives as undesirable and logistically impossible. The more resources we give to lone parents, the greater their numbers increase, and with the individual and social costs outlined above. Lone parenthood does not provide a liberation from the oppression of patriarchal family. Instead it creates poverty, incivility, and threats to the moral fabric of society. It has lead one writer to claim that there exists a growing "underclass", who live a self-centred existence with little attachment to social norms or morality.<sup>80</sup> The question facing the conservative is can any thing be done to counter this situation.

Most of the commentators discussed in this Chapter believe that governments can play an active role in promoting the family. Indeed, successive governments have helped to



facilitate the changes in the family and parenting that are now subject to the above debate. One of the first actions that must be taken is to challenge the very idea that nothing can be done; that there is an inevitability about the demise of the nuclear family. The question can be raised as to why, for example, environmental problems are not also inevitable and impossible to address. As Morgan points out, there is a tendency to slip into the philosophical error of moving from a descriptive to an evaluative statement. Because this "is" what is happening, we "ought" not to do anything about it. This reluctance to act is influenced by the tenets of moral egotism, whose value as an ethical system should be questioned.<sup>81</sup>

The Conservative Party has failed to respond to these problems for fear of alienating what it sees to be a key component of its electoral support, career women. But it too has been affected by the above philosophical debate. Within successive Conservative governments since 1979 there has been a conflict between those members that have a collectivist approach to society, emphasising shared values, and those who have a libertarian and individualistic view, stressing individual choice as a key moral value. While the latter view has been in the ascendancy, policy direction has tended to promote individual autonomy.

It is argued that a positive contribution to restoring the family can be made by re-directing economic policies, in particular with regards to the way families are taxed, and the commitment to full-time male employment. In addition benefits targeted specifically at single parents should be abolished. Policy considerations should include increasing the married man's allowance, allowing the full transfer of tax allowances between family members, and introducing child tax allowance's. Whilst such proposals would exclude certain people who did not pay tax, it would help to

encourage a spirit of self-reliance and a wish to achieve for one's family, so that they could benefit from these arrangements. Employers too should be allowed to offer different wage rates to those with dependents, especially men.<sup>82</sup>

In addition, state assistance in the form of benefits should be available to all children, not just those of single parents, and not just those who qualify for means related assistance. For example, a couple on Income Support can earn £5 per person without losing any benefits, while a single parent, who is exempt from the requirement to seek work, can earn £15; lone parents can get as much Family Credit as a two parent family, with a universal One-Parent Benefit (£6.05 in 1993\94) in addition to ordinary child benefit. Under proposed changes single-parent headed households would qualify for financial assistance in exactly the same way as other families.<sup>83</sup>

The effect of more women entering the workforce should also be countered. This is because standards of living are increasingly being judged on two incomes. Hence there is a reluctance to have children, or to have fewer, with parents sometimes working in "shifts" to look after the children while the spouse works. This causes stress within the family, and limits the attention to children and the opportunities to take part in family activities. This has lead to the demand for increased nursery provision for children. This demand should be resisted because of the costs involved, and the detrimental effects on children. It is suggested that good quality nursery care requires a ratio of one carer to three infants, in units of no more than ten children. The cost of this is prohibitive, and hence the claim is made that the state should take over the role. Yet the costs do not disappear, but re-emerge in taxes. In addition, research in America has found that children who go to day-care centres are more likely to



become aggressive and anti-social, as well as lacking mental stimulation and development. It should be noted that this research was conducted in some of the best facilities in the USA. Research in Britain has found that children can develop their language and mental skills far better within a home environment, regardless of class, than in a nursery school.<sup>84</sup>

Hence it is argued that nursery schooling is inefficient as it can be better performed by a mother, and at less cost. It is perhaps an interesting colloray that Levin argues that those Marxian inspired advocates of more child care facilities appear to abandon the detrimental effect of wage labour on employees, and the tendency to commodify one's task, when discussing the benefits of using paid workers to raise and look after children.<sup>85</sup>

Another area that the state should address is that of divorce law. It is argued that these laws have been shaped by the "inevitability" thesis over the decline of the family. Instead,

"rather than accepting a law which is merely like an onlooker, reacting to a given degenerating state of society, we should be looking for a law which is active in defining and supporting a desired and wholesome state of society."<sup>86</sup>

Barry argues that it is impossible to resurrect the idea of the marriage vow, which he sees as purely decorative.<sup>87</sup> However what should be done is to abolish the idea of "no fault" divorce, instead returning to the ideas of blame and justice in deliberating the outcome of the divorce settlement, and hence treating marriage as a contract, in the same way that other contracts are regulated. This, it is argued, would restore the pre-commitment to marriage, as marriage would be seen more clearly as involving rights and obligations. If these obligations were broken then the spouse would forego certain claims on maintenance and



communal property. And while the courts should favour custody of the children with the mother, any actions she performed which helped facilitate the marriage breakdown should be taken into account when final custody is awarded. Maintenance awards would also be rigorously enforced, and the tendency for one-off payments resisted.<sup>88</sup>

Hence marriage should be promoted as a desirable social institution. It should not be entered into lightly, nor the consequences of its breakdown treated casually, and passed over to the state. It is a long-term union which involve outcomes that will need long-term support.

In addition to the economic and legal changes that conservatives wish to see made, there must also be a change in attitudes and moral values. The concept of responsibility for choices and actions must be directed back to the individual from the state. Policy makers should stop responding to the various lobbies demanding the social engineering of gender, instead allowing people to form the conceptions of gender that will naturally develop within a society. This will help to facilitate nuclear families which are a natural consequence of our genders. At the same time conservatives should not appear neutral on moral issues, asserting the values they believe and stating why marriage is the best situation for the rearing of children. The present media message of sexual choice and variations in forms of families should be challenged, perhaps even through advertising, with arguments about the detrimental nature of such lifestyles for the individuals concerned, and for their off-spring, made clear. Indeed, it is argued that if people were provided with the "truth" on these matters then they would opt for the nuclear family.<sup>89</sup>

This task of educating attitudes and developing personal responsibility should begin at an early age. Parents should discuss with children their aspirations in life, stressing

the importance to acknowledge the consequences of their decisions, and challenging the media stereo-typing of adolescents. This is particularly relevant to early sexual experimentation, and the results that this can have, especially for young women. Resources, in the manner of advice from state sponsored groups or autonomous organisations, should be focused on areas where single-motherhood is prevalent, in an attempt to break such cycles.<sup>90</sup>

In the final section of this chapter I wish to offer a critical analysis of the above thesis on the family, and the attempt to address its declining status. I also wish to relate the above ideas to the philosophical work of Scruton, highlighting areas of continuity of approach, as well as areas of disagreement.

The above discussion of sexuality, morality and the family defends the situating of the sexual act within a social context. It is not a mere animal act but has consequences for the individuals concerned, and for society in general. Hence the defence of the institution of marriage, which focuses sexual desire onto an individual person, controlling the tendency to promiscuity, especially found in males. The outcome of such unions, ie children, can be more easily regulated and cared for, helping to develop the virtues of responsibility and integrity in both parents who will be providing for the children. At the same time children will be reared in an environment of support and stability, learning the moral values of their parents. Thus the nuclear family produces a benefit for individual members in promoting their happiness, and for society in general.

Such an approach would be endorsed by Scruton. He wishes to defend the importance of the social nature of the sexual



act and the institution of the family from those groups wishing to remove the social conditions restraining it. Hence Scruton attacks feminism for wishing to destroy the family, in the belief that this will liberate women from male domination. Scruton claims that this would in fact serve male needs, providing sexual relations without the demands of responsibility for the consequences. Dennis agrees with this point claiming that the changing of attitudes by women on sexual relations have greatly served male needs; "young men with a short-term view on life and hedonistic values have looked on with quiet delight, scarcely able to believe their luck."<sup>91</sup>

Whilst Scruton defends the institution of marriage, and a reversal of those changes in its legal enforcement making the dissolving of such unions easier, he would challenge the approach of Barry in describing marriage as a contract. Scruton states that marriage "imposes on the bond of erotic love the non-contractual and pious arrangement of the home." He goes on to state that "the greatest threat to marriage - as indeed to all institutions which permit the enlargement of the human spirit - is the *ideology of contract*: the view that no man can be bound except by terms to which he has consented."<sup>92</sup> Barry argues that this approach to marriage is impossible to re-create, instead placing marriage within a contractual framework in much the same way other contracts operate. This approach does create a number of problems. Firstly, if it is impossible to re-create the "vow" idea of marriage, as our present secular and desacrilising society would not accept it, then could not the whole project of trying to resurrect marriage per se also be impossible. The values in society which undermine the concept of vows may also undermine the concept of marriage as a life-long commitment.

Marriage does not fit the idea of contract well as its goals are not subject to specific elucidation, and



situations may arise that no previous agreement can adequately cover. To look after someone in "sickness and health" is not the type of clause that one would normally agree to in a contract. Barry would probably concede this point, instead claiming that the importance of the contractual aspect of marriage is when it is to be dissolved just settlements can be decided upon, based on breaking the terms of the agreement, in much the same way that compensation is negotiated in any termination of a contract. This stance appears difficult for the above reasons on the nature of the contractual agreement. Whilst certain factors may be easy to use as justifying reasons for divorce eg physical assault, how one would quantify them in terms of compensation is far more difficult. Psychological cruelty, or the strains placed on marriage by illness or problems with children would make such decisions even more difficult to decide upon. Such an approach, whilst stressing responsibilities, still has the effect of almost de-moralising marriage; we do not think that supplying goods to a contractual partner involves moral decisions. Nor does it help to promote or invigorate marriage. If the consequences of dissolution are perceived as potentially prohibitive then it does not make marriage an attractive option.

The approach of many of the commentators considered above in addressing the problems associated with the decline of the family is interesting for the challenges they make to a number of the tenets of conservatism, as well as to certain Conservative Party policies. As I have already discussed many Conservative politicians have supported the individual over community, valuing autonomy in all spheres, especially the economic. This approach has been challenged in the thesis above. Whilst there is support for market economics, this is not placed "above" other moral considerations, especially social consequences. Hence some writers are openly critical of an economic policy that has

replaced the goal of full employment with the controlling of inflation as the principle objective of the government's economic plan.<sup>93</sup> Economic support for the family via employment security and tax relief have come under increasing attack since 1979, with the emphasis being placed on the removal of the state from controlling what is going on in the economy at a micro level, and allowing a diversity of unhindered expression and choice of moral values.

Another conservative principle that is challenged is that something can be done to counter this present malaise; that government can diagnose the problem and propose measures to counter them. Traditionally conservatives have not supported such a purpose for government, claiming that society is too vast and complex to understand how it precisely operates, and that policies introduced may produce undesirable results that cannot be foreseen. Writers such as Morgan criticise this position saying that government policies have helped to create such a situation, so consequently they can do something to redress them. The problems are in some ways no different from many other problems for government, eg air pollution.

Conservatives have also been reluctant to undertake "social engineering" because of the diverse nature and abilities of people. This diversity has lead to inequalities between people because of differing skills and talents. This approach has been used to criticise ideas on social justice and socialism, claiming that inequalities will result in society naturally, and that there is no agreement on why or how anything should be done to counter them. As Scruton states, "social justice cannot, in the nature of things, root out those deep inequalities of skill, industry and talent which will once again cause some to rise and others to fall."<sup>94</sup> Such an approach on abilities would appear to have consequences for views on morality. A diversity in



natural talents and how we use them would also produce a differing understanding and prioritising of moral values. The problem would seem to be for the conservative that if we cannot agree on conceptions of justice with regards to economic distribution, then it seems unlikely that we can agree on other moral issues. If the state does not have a right to intervene to regulate the economic outcomes of individual actions, then can it have a right to intervene in private moral decisions.

The crisis of the nuclear family provides another dilemma for conservatives in that it begins to blur the boundaries between the public and private domains. Traditionally conservatives have viewed the family as a private moral area, where the role of parents is valued in their ability to raise children, and where the family itself is seen as the best way to teach children about moral values and obligations to other people. There is suspicion of the "expert" who uses theoretical constructs in telling people what the correct methods of child care are. Raising children requires practical rather than theoretical knowledge. The role of the state is to assist when there has been an obvious breakdown within families. However, it has been stated that there has been increasing pressure brought to bear by "intellectuals" and "experts", who have sought to undermine the nuclear family. The Conservative Government has yielded to such pressure, seeking to constantly reveal the "truths" about health and to advise us on sexual practices. Indeed the AIDS campaign has been criticised by many conservatives for contributing to the removal of sex from the private to the public domain, and for presenting sexual intercourse in a physical and non-moral manner.<sup>95</sup>

The response of many conservatives is to return to the previous principle of child rearing by two parents within a private family domain. The dilemma for the conservative



is that the nuclear family requires assistance to recover its previous position. Hence the conservative must take on the role of the "expert" telling the "truths" about the benefits of family life. It also requires government action and involvement in those private spheres of morality regulating sexuality and family life.

Many conservative theorists feel that the real task facing them is to re-establish the philosophical and moral framework defending the family, within which debates about it can take place. They wish to challenge and defeat the position of the defenders of alternative forms of family life, who claim that they disagree about ideas on the nuclear family. In the act of debating they are giving credence to the view that there are other forms of the family that could be sanctioned. Conservatives feel that this moral ground has been lost, with certain pressure groups, eg the Child Poverty Action Group, The National Council for One Parent Families, exerting media and governmental influence to such an extent that their issues are dominating the agenda. Conservatives wish to re-establish the commitment to the nuclear family, and then decide how best to promote it.

This argument on establishing a framework of moral attitudes on the family is important. For example if there exists the belief among teenage girls that pregnancy without a committed father is a possible scenario for them at a future time, then research in the USA has suggested that there is a threefold increase in the chances of it happening.<sup>96</sup> The task for the conservative is to make such an option immoral, lessening its appeal. The question then is how is such a task possible. As was mentioned above, some have claimed that what should be done is to inform people of the detrimental nature of lone parenthood, while others have claimed that changes in the law and welfare provisions should be introduced. Scruton argues that

neither of these measures will necessarily bring about a change in moral attitudes. For example, introducing a law to stop racial discrimination will not end such practices, if attitudes towards identity and nationality endorse a feeling of a sense of belonging to a common group or race of people. Until that attitude changes, people from another group or race may be excluded or treated detrimentally.<sup>97</sup> Moral attitudes contain beliefs and a reactive content based on these beliefs. They provide us with the motivation to act, in a way that theoretical knowledge cannot do. They are learnt through experience of a particular social existence or form of life.

"It is simply a *matter of fact* if these states of affairs can provide people with reasons for acting in a certain way. This is the point from which ethics must start, not the point at which it must arrive. This, in Wittgenstein's phrase, is what is "given".

Moral beliefs will be reflected in other spheres of human activity. A man's aesthetic preferences, his human relationships, and even his feelings about what must be true, all reflect the form of life which I have described as moral."<sup>98</sup>

Hence the argument that people will be convinced about the value of the family if they "know the facts" is flawed. People learn their moral values from the surrounding world in which they live. If this does not promote such values then they will not be motivated to act in accordance with them. While there may be good theoretical reasons for adopting such moral values most people will fail to grasp them or be motivated by them. They will lack what Schumpeter terms the "emotional attachment to the social order."<sup>99</sup> Thus Scruton defends the importance of myths in society that illustrate and promote certain moral values.

Dennis makes use of Schumpeter's arguments on the destructive role of the intellectual in capitalist society. Schumpeter claims that capitalism has an effect of rationalising society, removing the emotional attachment to



the state and the social order which is needed for people to respect its authority and abide by its moral precepts. This creates a critical attitude of mind, exemplified in the work of the intellectual. Once an institution has been challenged, its sacred form is removed and cannot be recovered. Indeed, Schumpeter believed that this process had already begun to happen with the family before the Second World War.<sup>100</sup>

This argument has two consequences for conservatives. Firstly it challenges the position of Barry on emphasising the contractual nature of marriage and divorce. This would appear to be precisely the rationalising that Schumpeter is critical of. Such an approach encourages the individuals discussing marriage to think about the costs and benefits of their decision, and the consequences of child rearing on their own freedom and development. The emotional benefits with regards to child rearing and establishing a family that will continue after one are hard to objectively quantify, and do not easily form a part of such calculations. Secondly, Schumpeter's argument that once a practice or institution has been desacrilised then it cannot return to its former status would appear to undercut the whole project of resurrecting the importance of the family that Dennis and others want to do.

Dennis also makes use of Wright Mills arguments on "Mass Society" and "The Cultural Apparatus".<sup>101</sup> This argument examines the differences between "public" and "mass" societies, with the different forms of "social" and "mass" knowledge that is found within them. Local or social knowledge is based around immediate experience and the ability to discuss what we see and hear, in relation to our lives. In public society we are active participators who value our position and status within a social situation. We exist in a social group with people of different classes and abilities. In a mass society we do not interact fully



with a large range of people, but make use of services that are owned by large corporations, shopping in large shops, working for multinational corporations, and living in functional housing units. Our knowledge comes via the media and is dominated by the anonymous expert. The agenda is set by them, with no opportunities for response and debate. Information and issues are introduced which we have no control over and cannot really make a reasoned response to. Instead we are guided into the "correct" moral replies by the manner of the expert presentation. The issues that are brought forward for discussion are designed to appeal not to a social group but to a particular milieu of like minded people. Wright Mills argues that what is needed is to return to social groups discussing localised issues that feed into larger debates.

If this analysis is correct then the consequences for writers such as Dennis is not good. The problem of lone parenthood has been compounded by the work of the media and the ethos it promotes. However this cannot be changed in itself as the style of media presentation is itself linked to the growth in mass society. Therefore the only way it can be addressed is through reconstituting the idea of community and curbing the power of large corporations. This would appear to be an enormous task, and one that would be against conservative views on political and social epistemology and the role of government.

Most of the conservative commentators discussed in this Chapter echo the views discussed in the previous chapter on gender, sexual morality and marriage that Scruton philosophically defends. They argue that gender differences are related to our biological differences, that sexual desire is a social artefact, requiring social control to combat immediate satisfaction and sexual promiscuity, and that marriage is a beneficial institution to those who join

it, for the rearing of children, and as a moral unit within society. However, they wish to proceed from where Scruton finishes, by analysing why the family is in decline, what the consequences are, and what can be done to counter it. Its decline is revealed in the statistics on divorce, single-parenthood and cohabitation, with the consequences detrimental to the adults and children involved, and to society as a whole. The causes of the malaise are related to the political protest movements of the 1960's, which helped to spurn the feminist movement and libertarian ideals, which have themselves become perverted forms of egotism, emphasising the denial of responsibility for actions. Coupled to this has been the growth in mass society and the media which has allowed the transmission of anti-familial values. The problem has become more pronounced during the 1980's as the Conservative Government placed less emphasis on collective values, instead stressing the importance of the individual and economic freedom. Hence they did nothing to strengthen the nuclear family.

It is interesting to note that the significance of advancements in contraception, especially the oral Pill, do not feature as an important factor in the above arguments over the decline of the family and the "degeneration" of sexual morality. Morgan makes the point that the ability for women to have more control over pregnancy has made males increasingly feel that if their partner gets pregnant then this is her problem as she has the means to control it via contraception and abortion.<sup>102</sup> Yet it would appear that if one of the arguments defending traditional sexual mores was the fear of pregnancy, if this fear is removed then this must have consequences for sexual activity. If this is so then it would seem logical that controlling the availability of contraceptives could be seen as a policy option in promoting family values.



The proposals put forward to reinvigorate the family as an institution involve the re-establishment of moral attitudes in favour of the family by challenging the anti-family ethos found in the media and undercutting the influence of certain pressure groups. They also wish to see a change in the law, especially relating to divorce, and new directions in economic and social policies. It is interesting to note that American theorists are less committed to state intervention to save the family, instead favouring deregulation eg in allowing women to work at home and take boarders.<sup>103</sup> Perhaps this reflects the more advanced state of decline of the nuclear family in America, and their belief that the best that can be done is to try and get single mothers back into the workplace.

The task to reverse the trend in the decline in the nuclear family seems vast and will no doubt be unpopular. The most important goal is to change attitudes to responsibility and sexual desire, transferring it from an immediate object to a long-term project. There must also be a change to the belief that the state should be responsible for looking after the children of this breakdown in sexual and family values. However, as Scruton makes clear, moral attitudes are complex and not responsive to enforced legislation. Perhaps the only option for the conservative is to take Schumpeter's advice, and "put up a fight under the flag of their own ideals and interests."<sup>104</sup>



## Notes

1. Campion,J., "Marriage, Morals and the Law", The Salisbury Review, December 1994, p.25.

2. Goodman,P., "The Future of the Family", The Salisbury Review, March 1992, p.15.

3. ibid., p.15.

4. Morgan,P., Farewell to the Family?, IEA Health and Welfare Unit, London, 1995, p.4.

See also, Murray,C,. Underclass: The Crisis Deepens, IEA Health and Welfare Unit, London, 1994, pp.7-9.

5. Morgan, op.cit. (Note 4.), p.5.

6. Goodman, op.cit. (Note 2.), p.15.

7. Morgan, op.cit. (Note 4.), pp.83-87.

8. Dennis,N., Rising Crime and the Dismembered Family, The IEA Health and Welfare Unit, London, 1993, pp. 46-55.

9. Carlson,A., "Liberty, Order and the Family", in J.Davies (ed.), The Family: is it just another lifestyle choice?, The IEA Health and Welfare Unit, London, 1993, p.10.

10. It should be noted that when discussing lone parents and defending the nuclear family I am including, if only tacitly, households where a spouse is deceased in the latter category. This is because the values associated with this arrangement are similar to the nuclear family, and there does not appear to be the same problems involved with adult and children members that are exhibited by other lone-parent groups. There has also been no apparent change in their numbers during the period under analysis.

See: Dennis, op.cit. (Note 8.), p.50;

Morgan, op.cit. (Note 4.), pp.156-159.

11. Novak,M., The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism, IEA Health and Welfare Unit, London, 1991, p.167.

12. Wilson,G., "Biology, Sex Roles and Work", in C.Quest (ed.), Liberating Women from Modern Feminism, IEA Health and Welfare Unit, London, 1994.

13. Rowlandson,P., "Gender Psychoanalysis and Intelligence: The Case against Affirmative Action", The Salisbury Review, September 1989.

14. Lanca, P., "Down with Feminazis!", The Salisbury Review, June 1994.
15. Carroll, J., "Male and Female", The Salisbury Review, December 1992, p.17.
16. Claire Rayner quoted in, Morgan, op.cit. (Note 4.), introductory page.
17. Morgan, P., "The Family: No Possibility of Ethical Neutrality", in D.Anderson and G.Frost (eds.), Hubris: The Tempting of Modern Conservatives, The Centre For Policy Studies, Cambridge, 1992, pp.39-41.
18. Berger, B., "The Bourgeois Family and Modern Society", in J.Davies (ed.), The Family: Is it just another lifestyle choice?, IEA Health and Welfare Unit, London, 1993, pp.14-24.
19. Dennis, op.cit. (Note 8.), p.4.
- Barry, B., "Justice and Liberty in Marriage and Divorce", in C.Quest (ed.), Liberating Women from Modern Feminism, IEA Health and Welfare Unit, London, 1994, p.38.
20. Dennis, op.cit. (Note 8.), p.6.
21. ibid., Chp.6, pp.37-45.
22. Dennis, N. and Erdos, G., Families without Fatherhood, Second Ed., IEA Health and Welfare Unit, London, 1993, pp.55-60.
23. Dennis, op.cit. (Note 8.), pp.32-33.
24. Morgan, op.cit. (Note 4.), p.58.
25. Murray, op.cit. (Note 4.), pp.28-29.
26. Dennis and Erdos, op.cit. (Note 22.), p.61.
27. ibid., p.70.
28. Dennis, op.cit. (Note 8.), pp.15-18.
29. Dennis and Erdos, op.cit. (Note 22.), pp.64-65.
30. Taylor, J.K., "Why aren't all women feminists?", in C.Quest (ed.), Liberating Women from Modern Feminism, IEA Health and Welfare Unit, London, 1994, pp.92-95.
31. ibid., p.95.
32. Lanca, op.cit. (Note 14.), p.22.
33. ibid., pp.21-22.



34. Bennett, F., "The State, Welfare and Women's Dependence", in Segal, L., What's to be Done About the Family, Penguin and the Socialist Society, 1980, p.200, quoted in Morgan, op.cit. (Note 4.), p.51;

Slipman, S., "Lets all Blame Single Mothers", She, March, 1994, quoted in Morgan, op.cit. (Note4.), p.115.

35. ibid., pp.101-103.

36. ibid., pp.152-153.

Greer argues that the state should support single mothers as they are providing a workforce that will contribute to the support of the increasing elderly population in British society.

Greer, G., "The Hard Facts of Motherhood: It Is Time Mothers Were Given More Help and Less Blame", The Sunday Times, 8 August 1993, quoted in, Dennis, op. cit., (Note 8.), pp. 68-69.

37. Kenny, M., "The Family: A Matriarchal Institution", in C. Quest (ed.), Liberating Women from Modern Feminism, IEA Health and Welfare Unit, London, 1994, pp.28-37.

38. Dennis, op.cit. (Note 8.), p.10.

Wright Mills, C., "The Cultural Apparatus", in I.L. Horowitz (ed.), Power, Politics and People: The collected papers of C. Wright Mills, Oxford University Press, New York, 1963, pp.405-422.

39. Dennis, op.cit. (Note 8.), pp.18-19.

40. ibid., p.12.

41. Dennis and Erdos, op.cit. (Note 22.), p.36.

At the time of writing (5.5.95), the popular Australian soap opera "Neighbours" is celebrating the "birth" of two babies; one to a single mother who has no contact with the father, the other to an unmarried couple living together. This programme is broadcast twice a day, once at a time designed to capture children\teenage viewers.

42. Levin, M., "Children and Feminism", in C. Quest (ed.), Liberating Women from Modern Feminism, IEA Health and Welfare Unit, London, 1994, p.84.

43. See Bulmer, F., "Sweet and Innocent", The Salisbury Review, September, 1991, pp.26-27.

44. Morgan, op.cit. (Note 17.), p.39.

45. Murray, op.cit. (Note 4.), p.vi.



46. Hoff Summers, C., "Teaching the Virtues", The Salisbury Review, June, 1992, pp.12-16.

Holbrook, D., "The Virus of Evil in Culture", The Salisbury Review, September, 1994, pp.11-13.

47. Morgan, op.cit. (Note 4.), pp.90-91.

48. ibid., pp.96-98.

49. Barry, op.cit. (Note 19.), p.45.

50. Hegel, G.W.F., Elements of the Philosophy of Right, trans, H.B.Nisbet, (ed.) A.W.Wood, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1991, Section 75.

51. ibid., Section 158.

52. ibid., Section 163.

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## Chapter Four

### Conservatism and Established Religion

In the first chapter I outlined a conservative approach to human nature and morality. In Chapter Two I analyzed a philosophical defence such an approach offers to sexual morality, before then examining how this approach has influenced and reinforced the arguments currently being offered by various think-tanks and other publications concerned with influencing practical policies on morality and the family. Whilst I alluded to the role that religion and the Church could play and contribute to these issues, I deliberately avoided examining the topic in detail. This I now wish to do.

Traditionally conservatism has had a long association with the Christian religion, and in particular the Anglican Church. Indeed religion, in the form of Christianity, is part of Quinton's twin characterisation of the conservative tradition; the other being a secular tradition of conservative thought<sup>1</sup>. The Christian idea of original sin has been translated by conservative thinkers into the idea of moral imperfection, or the belief that men are not naturally good, but require the state and society to make them so. There is also support from Christianity for the thesis of intellectual imperfection, questioning man's ability to achieve knowledge without the assistance of divine revelation. However, the Christian basis for this thesis is of less significance than its secular account. Quinton in his analysis of conservative thinkers reinforces this belief in the importance of Christianity and the Anglican Church by arguing that the first major work of British conservative thought is found in Hooker's *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, which was written as a defence of the Elizabethan Church Settlement<sup>2</sup>.

Throughout the 1980's there appeared, at least publicly, to

be an increasing tension between the Church of England and the Conservative Government. The Church was critical of the stress placed on market-led economics, and what it saw as the increase in individualism, hedonism and materialism. In turn the Conservative criticism was focused on what it saw as the Church's increasing involvement in public issues as opposed to issues of private morality. Indeed, the decline in the number of active Church members and its lack of guidance and influence over moral issues have lead some commentators to question the relevance of Christian religion to conservative theory. As Devigne states, "In sum, the Church of England and Christianity in general are marginal concerns of new British conservative theory."<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, cultural conservatives have maintained an interest in religious issues and in the fate of the Church of England. Indeed, throughout the above mentioned time such authors were expressing their concerns over the fate of Christianity and its role in society, and the intensity of these debates has not lessened. In this Chapter I wish to analyse why conservatives wish to defend the Christian religion and the Church of England, together with the varying approaches that this takes, before going on to analyse why there has been conflict between such writers and the Anglican Church. I then wish critically to asses the consequences of this debate for politics and for the conservative project for society.

As was mentioned above, Christianity is used by many conservatives as a form of bedrock for their views on human potential, and the role of the state in defending order and socialising the individual. It is seen as giving force and sanctions to morality, and hence its usefulness is defended in utilitarian language as being of benefit to the social order.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, there should be no separation between law and the moral\religious order as this alienates people from



the rule of law. These issues are of increasing importance because of the breakdown of the traditional moral\religious ties, with a result that religious fervour has reappeared in secular issues in what may be seen as dangerous and uncontrolled forms, eg revolutionary socialism.

"Religion, when it breaks free from institutions, and elects the individual conscience as its sovereign, is as much a danger to the social order as a support to it."<sup>5</sup>

Such an approach to religion does appear to give support to the Marxist who wishes to argue that religion is merely a controlling device of the powerful over the weak. Conservatives reject this assertion, instead stating that there is a inherent spiritual need in humans which will manifest itself in a belief in the transcendental. A defence of this position can be found in Scruton's later work.

According to Scruton, what religious explanations attempt to do is bridge the gap between meaning and experience. Hence there is a similarity between religious experience and aesthetic experience. Man's need for religion is derived from his awareness of others, and the relationship he has with them. Our need for a family and community, as well as our desire to be connected and to understand our predecessors and dependents leads us to become aware of transcendental bonds. This is reinforced through the idea of sacrifice to the community of which we are a part. Such bonds are often symbolised in objects which evoke emotions and a sense of meaning outside or beyond our present experience. Hence there is the same dilemma as experienced in aesthetics; how to make universal judgements on what is a personal and subjective experience.

Scruton makes use of Kant's ideas on theology to try and provide the bridge between meaning and experience. Kant viewed rational theology as an *antinomy*; "the attempt to

reach beyond the perspective of experience to the absolute vantage-point from which the totality of things (and hence the world as it is in itself) can be surveyed."<sup>6</sup> Hence the idea of a supreme being is a product of reason which directs us to view the world and the connections within it as originating from a necessary cause. The moral nature of rational beings resides in the ability to impregnate all judgements and attitudes with the demands of practical reason. At the heart of this is the respect for the moral law and its imperative nature. This process of abstraction leads to a belief in God. The possibility of God and an immortal soul cannot be theoretically known or understood, but must be assumed. Kant reinforces his position by once again returning to the link between aesthetics and theology.

Within aesthetics we become aware of our own limitations in relation to the awesome nature of the world. Kant draws a familiar distinction between the beautiful and the sublime. The beautiful involves the harmony between nature and our own senses; the sublime is experienced when we are overcome by the infinite greatness of the world. "A man who can feel neither the solemnity nor the awesomeness of nature, lacks in our eyes the necessary sense of our own limitations. He has not taken that *transcendental* viewpoint of himself from which all true morality springs."<sup>7</sup>

From this argument about aesthetics Kant derives his belief in God and teleology. Nature is viewed as created and, with its purpose revealed in beauty, and its evocation of the sublime revealing its transcendental origin. This defence cannot be put into reasoned argument as we can know nothing of the transcendental. Instead it is something that we can feel. The argument from design is not a proof, but a moral intimation. It becomes realised in our rational acts.

"Aesthetic experience and practical reason are two aspects of the moral: and it is through



morality that we sense both the transcendence and the immanence of God."<sup>8</sup>

The influence of Kant's theology on Scruton becomes more visible in his defence of forms of worship. It is in the very act of worship that God is *defined*<sup>9</sup>, and in a manner far more precisely than in any theological argument. An act of worship should evoke the same responses as those of beauty and sublimity in aesthetics. The believer should feel at harmony with the service, while at the same time be drawn to the transcendental and the question of salvation. Hence particular rites evoke particular images of God. Changes in liturgy can change the nature of God and our beliefs.

"In the Mass the believer comes face to face with God; and the urgency of the ceremony lies there."<sup>10</sup>

The above position defending a need for religion is challenged by those thinkers wishing to produce a naturalistic explanation of religious values. Two of the most celebrated defenders of this philosophical approach are Nietzsche and Marx. Nietzsche argued that Christianity was illusionary and misrepresented human nature in its attempt to promote the interests of the weak against the strong. Marx argued that Christianity was part of the ideology of capitalism. Those oppressed under capitalism do genuinely believe in it because of its truth. However, if we stand back from society we can give an explanation for its existence as a means for channelling and suppressing dissatisfaction and alienation cause by the structure of society. Both Nietzsche and Marx wished to remove the ideas of mystery and faith from human existence, revealing instead the bare reality of life. The aim of both was to introduce secular moralities, being based either on self-affirmation, or on the struggle for a just world society.

For Scruton the consequences for such secular moralities are potentially calamitous for society. Firstly such



moralties have produced unhappiness and atrocities. This is because the value of the human individual is lessened, being replaced by a scientific and impersonal approach to human arrangements. Methods of living are not afforded any special reverence, with political actions becoming bureaucratic decisions. What is permissible is decided by men, and can be changed accordingly. Hence the death camp becomes a viable proposition in the pursuit of utopia.

The removal of God however does not remove the need for a desire to reach beyond the present world. We still have a need for religious fervour. In contemporary society this manifests itself in the attachment to political issues, eg anti-racism, sexism animal rights etc. These causes can be pursued by supporters with a fanaticism, and in some cases brutality, that exceeds the moral claims of the cause concerned. For Scruton, perhaps the most serious consequence of the removal of religious faith from society is that man becomes nothing more than "the mortal organism, the slowly evaporating gobbet of flesh."<sup>11</sup> Hence man becomes alienated from his species, believing that only what he experiences in his life is of value. The sense of community, history and posterity are removed. This leads to a questioning of his position in society, with constant demands being made. The idea of Providence is no longer relevant, so that even one's birth and sexuality can be challenged, and redress for inequalities and injustice sort. There is also an obsession with health and life, with a desire to live longer at almost any cost. The end result is a deconstructed world of valueless existence - Nothingness.

"Not to see them (human distinctions) under the aspect of fortune is to loose one's grip of human things, to become fascinated by a fantasy of interference, to take steps towards that brave new world of which the pervasive meddling in what is given destroys both nature and value together."<sup>12</sup>

For Scruton religion and a belief in God provides the intimation towards the meaning we try to derive from the practical experiences of our life. Michael Oakeshott makes use of a similar argument, yet wishes to ground it much more in the world that we inhabit rather than in the possibility of a transcendent purpose. Oakeshott states that

"Religion is not, as some would persuade us, an interest attached to life, a subsidiary activity; nor is it a power which governs life from the outside with a, no doubt divine, but certainly incomprehensible, sanction for its authority. It is simply life itself, life dominated by the belief that its value is in the present, not merely in the past or future, that if we lose ourselves we lose all."<sup>13</sup>

Religious thinking involves a particular style of thinking. It does not require strict adherence to a set of dogmatic beliefs. Nor, unlike Scruton, are particular ceremonies or acts of worship important. To adopt a religious attitude is to value things for what they are here and now, and not as a contribution to some development or utopian other-world. For Oakeshott the religious man is distinguished for his belief in the reality and permanence of the order of things. Like Kant's conception of beauty, the religious man is in harmony with his life and world of experience.

"The religious man, though he may take himself seriously, will not bore others by letting them know that he does so, because it is only in the world's view that a man is better off for being known to be what he is; for religion it is enough to be it."<sup>14</sup>

Oakeshott does have an account of transcendence, although it is not central to his theology. Religion does not offer a moral system per se, nor should it be used as a method of metaphysical sanction. Indeed, only the moral man is capable of a religious disposition. Instead morality should be seen as the *completion of morality*. Trying to live a moral life leaves us feeling incomplete; we strive to find



something beyond our present experience. Goodness cannot be achieved by an agent becoming better, but by losing himself in God. God is that end we are searching for, and hence religion completes this. Yet for Oakeshott this has to be achieved in the world in which we live. It must manifest itself in our actions. In order for an action to be moral it must be free and wise. And this form of practical wisdom is produced through developing our religious point of view. The more we develop this viewpoint the more we become in harmony with our situation, and value and inculcate the prevailing moral conventions. Thus religion is "the motive power, the growing point and the completed whole of merely moral ideas."<sup>15</sup>

For both Scruton and Oakeshott religion is an answer to the philosophical problem of meaning in life. In an effort to move away from the meaningless nothingness of pure human existence, God and religion has become manifest to provide the intimation of purposefulness in our lives. Yet for certain conservatives the need for religion is justified from a more definite foundation; it is true. Two conservatives who fall within this tradition are Edward Norman and Enoch Powell.<sup>16</sup>

Powell argues that man acquired the power of speech and thought, *Logos*, which gave him power over the world. Yet in our quest for knowledge we are often mistaken, and the desire for ultimate knowledge results in frustration. It is an act of faith to believe that as nothing comes from nothing, that the reality of *Logos* must have existed before man in the universe. Hence Powell affirms St. John's claim that "in the beginning was the word", and that "the word became flesh and dwelt in us". This gives us a picture of God the Spirit. This joining together of the flesh and the spirit differentiates mankind from other animals, and the freedom and self-consciousness that this created allowed us



to recognise good and evil. Good and evil are present in the universe, for it was God who planted the tree of knowledge in the Garden of Eden. Thus moral evil is a part of man. Man addresses sin through sacrifice, and its highest form self-sacrifice or love. The sacrifice of Christ exemplifies God's love for the world.

"Faith is believing something which, though not provable, so takes possession of us that it is impossible afterwards to imagine living without it. It has the force of inevitability. If I am asked why I believe in the Trinity, I reply: *Because it is inevitable.*"<sup>17</sup>

From the above discussion it can be argued that conservatives are willing to offer a defence of religion from a number of positions. Some commentators stress that one should believe in God because he exists, while others stress that a belief in the transcendental is inherent in man's psyche, and that the abandonment of it will lead to spiritual and moral isolation. If religious belief is unaddressed or left uncontrolled then it will manifest itself in forms that may be of detriment to the social order. Hence religion has political implications. Both Scruton and Oakeshott in their views on the role that the transcendental can make in producing a person in harmony with his position in life are making implicit statements on the social usefulness of religion. Scruton wishes to see religious belief "overseen" by the state, while Oakeshott's arguments imply a religious and moral homogeneity that the religious man will increasingly become aware of and endorse.

In the following section I wish to analyse the varying approaches conservative writers adopt, not just to religion, but to Christianity in particular, and how this relates to British culture and the state.

Both Norman and Powell support the thesis that Christianity

is about individual salvation, and that it has little\no coherent political message. Its message is directed towards redemption in another world. As Norman states:

"Christianity regards the salvation of men as a free gift of God, conveyed through the operation of supernatural grace, in which alone comes justification."<sup>18</sup>

However, the Christian is concerned with the fate of men in the world. Hence a balance is needed between these two positions. Norman is concerned that contemporary Christians have become more concerned with the earthly salvation of man at the expense of his spiritual salvation. In so doing they have rejected many key tenets of the Christian faith. In particular they have placed stress on group identity and values at the expense of the individual, together with a changing view on the perfectibility of human nature.

It is the individual Christian who must respond to the message of the Gospels, and must take responsibility for his actions; Christian belief starts with the personal acknowledgement of sin and belief. Christianity also acknowledges the imperfection of human nature, and that man cannot be perfected in the material world. Hence the Gospels do not offer a political plan for the world. Individual Christians should address the defects in their own lives, and should help others *as individuals*, through acts of personal charity. They should not pass over responsibility or give support to groups wishing to establish, for example, social justice for the poor. They can get involved in politics, but again as individuals sharing their Christian insight, not espousing a Christian political plan.

According to Norman the Christian should be aware that men are capable of giving their political and moral support to almost any set of moral priorities. They should acknowledge this relativism, and be reticent at adopting today's social



issues as the true meaning of Christianity. "Today's solemn declaration of the true purpose of Christ's teaching is tomorrow's reviled illustration of false prophecy."<sup>19</sup>

Similarly the secular values that the Church is willing to endorse are based on foundations that are open to political debate - they are essentially contested. An example of this dilemma is to be found with the support that certain Christian leaders give to *human rights*. Whilst Christians may endorse many of the freedoms enshrined in human rights declarations, they should not be viewed as some kind of definitive or sacred statement. Human rights are often derived from arguments about natural law. The Catholic Church is based on natural law, which is not contested as it has divine authority. Outside of the Catholic Church, the Christian should remember that the content of natural laws is contested and subject to differing interpretations. They do not have the authority of God.

The wish of certain Christians to take on moral and political issues can be of great damage to Christianity *per se*. It encourages the tendency to see man as an autonomous individual, capable of achieving perfection without the grace of God. It can also generate individuals, alienated from society, who pursue causes with a fervour and ferocity that leads to the questioning of the moral worth of their opponents.

Rather than become involved in successive causes, the Church should stress its ultimate truth and ahistorical nature. It should be a faith and a way of life against which other ideals should be judged. It should stress the importance of the individual, and individual moral worth, rather than looking at collective issues. It needs to reaffirm the spiritual interpretations of the Gospels, and not seek to change the material world.



Norman uses the above approach to Christianity to defend a conception of pluralism. Christianity can provide a moral inspiration to its members, yet it does not offer a blueprint for politics and governance. It is compatible with a variety of political positions. Hence he is willing to draw a division between public and private morality, and allow for a plurality of values in society. However, he does assume an underlying agreement over certain moral values. He argues that this defence of pluralism allows the maintenance of certain personal liberties and stops the enforcement of ideological values on an unwilling populous. He does not support the concept of multiculturalism, whereby ethnic groups are encouraged to assert their own identities, rather than be encouraged to assimilate into the prevailing tradition of society. Multiculturalism is unfortunately supported by many Church leaders.<sup>20</sup>

As a consequence of Norman's views on pluralism, he believes that the state should be secular, so as to allow "the cultivation of diversities". Hence it is an anomaly that there should be an Established Church, as the electorate can vote on moral issues. Norman acknowledges this but says that as the system appears to work then such an anomaly should be allowed to continue.<sup>21</sup> This is a point that will be discussed later in the Chapter.

Enoch Powell has a similar interpretation of the relationship between Christianity and politics and morality to Norman. However his view is that Christianity has virtually no contribution to make to these issues. Indeed Christianity is becoming increasingly mysterious to Powell. Within the teachings of Christ there are many paradoxes, eg I cannot love someone else as myself. As a consequence it is impossible to build up a coherent social message from Christianity, and hence,

"There are no logical bridges which lead across the gulf between the assertions of Christianity

and the conduct of the world's business."<sup>22</sup>

The Churches should not become involved in political issues. Christianity cannot provide them with a social theology, nor are they equipped with the socio-political expertise to enter into the debate. Christianity cannot offer advice on eg entry into the EEC, and its potential involvement in the intricacies of eg financial policies are degrading and potentially blasphemous.<sup>23</sup>

Powell takes a literal reading rather than an interpretational reading of the scriptures. He argues that the message of Christianity is essentially other-worldly; that Christ did not help the poor through social policies but through miracles, eg he claims that it is even beyond the National Health Service to raise the dead as Christ did.<sup>24</sup> The salvation of mankind can only be achieved by believing in the life and the resurrection of Christ. Hence his rejection of the religious pluralism endorsed by the Churches, which he believes is undermining the beliefs of Christians, and hindering the missionary aspects of Christianity.

Thus one conservative approach to Christianity stresses its truth, revealed in the scriptures. It is essentially other-worldly, and can offer little guidance to politics. I now wish to examine a some what different conservative philosophy which stresses the essential and necessary link between Christianity and the state.

As was discussed above, Oakeshott views religion as essentially related to this world. The religious point of view contributes to our sense of unity and harmony in our lives. The historical evidence is important in Christianity, but not *prima facie*. It does not reveal an unchanging core of truths essential to belief.

"Identity, so far as Christianity is concerned, must be discovered in the facts of history, not



as something unchanging, or some substance common to them all, but as a kind of qualitative sameness."<sup>25</sup>

If our belief in Christianity is based on historical evidence, then our evidence will be found wanting. The details about Christ's life are incomplete, eg what happened after his death.

We discover and interpret Christianity through the textual accounts, in order to produce a *qualitative sameness* or tradition of Christian belief. Yet there is no unchanging core to appeal to. Practices which may have been part of the religion at some time, may be discarded and new ones introduced that may conversely have been rejected a previous time. However, changes must be effected "in such a way as to cause no absolute break in the development and to comply with its general nature as a religion."<sup>26</sup> Hence Oakeshott's interpretation of religious belief has much in Common with Wittgenstein's ideas on family forms, and parallels his own ideas on traditions in politics.

Oakeshott's views on Christianity are a religious complement to his approach to morality. Oakeshott argues that morality requires practical knowledge, and cannot be abstracted or turned into a set of rules or principles as the rationalist wishes to do. It has to be experienced, and be part of a social arrangement and tradition of behaviour.<sup>27</sup> Similarly the only morality Christianity has produced is our morality, as morality cannot exist in a book, be it the Bible or a work of ethics.<sup>28</sup> It must be the completion of the moral, a high point for the social man to aspire. Hence the test for its validity is not philosophical truth, but essentially practical; its justification is based on whether "it bears its fruits." Hence sacraments, historical cores, and forms of liturgy are not what Christianity is about. If they fail continually to inspire the appropriate responses from citizens then they can be reformed or changed, provided



they still retain those values felt to be traditional within a social arrangement. Hence Christianity should be subject to a pragmatic test rather than a demonstration of its logical consistency.

On an Oakeshottian interpretation religion, and Christianity in particular, has an intrinsic link to the social order, yet it does not have an explicit link to politics. Nor is the form it takes of any major significance, provided that it passes the test of relevance and significance for the members of society. Other conservatives take a different approach to this, stressing the link between politics and religion and the significance of the forms of religious rite.

Scruton defends the link between politics and religion. He claims that religion is the bulwark of morality, and as both are forms of intolerance then they should be controlled by the state. It is important to note that there appears to be two themes running through his ideas on religion: that religion is of use to the state and should hence be promoted and controlled; that religion and the forms they take are of value in themselves and should be defended for their intrinsic worth rather than for their utility. The weight placed behind each set of arguments changes at various times. These differing approaches found in Scruton's work will be discussed later in the Chapter.

The conservative recognises the potential difficulties that exist in the relationship between politics and religion. Yet the conservative does not shy away from them, nor should they relegate the religious to the private in moral action. This is because the conservative requires individuals to be virtuous citizens, and recognises that there is a correlation between public and private morality. The Church also has a role to play in supporting the institutions of the state. Citizens should find contentment

in the religious values of the Church of England. It should offer a relief to everyday problems by encouraging an acceptance of one's position in society, in the belief that a person will achieve redemption in Heaven. Hence Scruton argues that such beliefs are useful in redirecting the thirst for social change that discontented men may have, which is ultimately ruinous<sup>29</sup>.

The Church can also foster a sense of identity and community by expounding values which will be shared by all members of society, and by having a shared set of practices. It offers a reconciliation and understanding of birth, life and death, and has the ability to generate "consoling myths" to explain existence in the social order. The Church also contributes to the ceremonial of the state and the generating of nationalistic emotion.

Despite the above, the Church itself should not take an active political role or stance. Its purpose is spiritual, and its increasing entry into the political arena has had a weakening effect on its role in society; there is the danger of it being seen as just another pressure group. This weakening of its position in the Establishment is a worry for Scruton. So much so that "The restoration of the Church may well become a serious political cause."<sup>30</sup>

Scruton also defends religious practice for the contribution it makes to British culture. In so doing he comes into agreement with Anglicans who wish to defend the Book of Common Prayer, and traditional worship within the Church of England.

In his defence of the spiritual, outlined above, Scruton drew heavily on the work of Kant and the defence of the sacred. In order to maintain the sacred he argues that there is a need for a collective rite. Indeed, the act of worship defines God in a far more clear fashion than does



theology. Hence the significance of religious ceremonies in producing an intimation of the transcendental. The danger of changing liturgies and rites is that it not only does it take away from the believer some thing that is familiar, it can also change the image of God that is manifest, and in effect create a new religion. Traditional services also reflect the historical continuum in religious belief and life, by providing a link with the past and providing a bulwark to the thirst for change and causes found in contemporary society.

The style and language of liturgies has both an aesthetic and theological value. Spurr argues that there is a need for a sacred language, and that this is common to most religions. That the task of liturgical language "should be both evocative of the eternal and intelligible within the discourse of the times and cultures in which it is used."<sup>31</sup> Those who wish to re-write liturgies to make them plain and understandable miss the purpose of what is going on. As he points out, Cranmer did not write in the everyday language of the sixteenth century; he used what could be described as a theological language. The significance of Cranmer's work is that "Cranmer's language has a power, lacking in modern liturgical writing, to stimulate the sensibility as well as to inform the mind."<sup>32</sup>

Spurr also defends The Book of Common Prayer from the claim that the language is too difficult for people to understand, or that it restricts the flexibility of worship to respond to the demands of parish locations and congregational type. He claims that today's would-be parishioners have no difficulty in understanding computer language; that this is not attacked as being too difficult for children to learn at school. He also states that by having a core set of beliefs and practices, as found in the Book of Common Prayer, and eg the 39 Articles, then this allows a certain degree of interpretation and modification



because all can acknowledge the key tenet of the religion. Without such a core, Anglicanism becomes a series of constant committees and competition between groups favouring various interpretations.

Spurr also agrees with Scruton on the role that myth plays in religion, and the importance of liturgy in this. He draws on the work of another Anglican, David Martin, when he claims that religion has more in common with spells than rules, and that liturgy is a way of remembering them and being bound in a certain direction. Generations of believers have learnt religious truths through learning the liturgies of the Church by rote; they were learned by heart. It is relatively unimportant that the full range of meaning was not known, as this is common in many other areas of intellectual and spiritual practice, eg poetry. If we de-mystify then we encourage enquiry and a false sense of mastery.<sup>33</sup>

Much of the above defence of Anglican Christianity would be supported by Scruton. However, he wishes to develop the argument by relating it to culture and politics. Anglicanism is part of what Scruton defines as the common culture. This is the moral environment we live and take part in. It provides us with our practical knowledge on how to act and the boundaries of acceptability. The Christian religion is an obvious part of this, and also helped to form the high culture of society, of which aesthetic experience is the core. High culture both reflects and passes comment on the common culture of which it exemplifies. Access is not open to all, and requires induction. It acts as a form of guard over the common culture protecting its values and reinvigorating them when the sense of community is threatened. It contains art, literature and music; those practices which attempt to offer meaning to our experiences.

Modern Western society grew out of Christianity, and this is reflected in the values of obedience, law and contract which underpin the democratic political arrangements. These values are renewed in the celebration of the Mass. With the decline of the sacred, the idea of obedience has already been lost. The concern for Scruton is that with the further undermining of the role of the Christian religion the values of law and contract will be lost as well, to be replaced by the Nothingness and oppression of totalitarianism.<sup>34</sup>

From the above discussion it would appear that an established form of Christianity is of importance for many conservatives. If this is so then the important question is why have relations between conservatives and various Christian churches experienced increasing tensions from the early 1980's onwards. Whilst this coincides with a prolonged period of Conservative Government, criticisms of the Church have been forthcoming from those theorists outside of direct involvement in politics, and who often have philosophical disagreements with the policies emanating from those in power.

It is worth noting that the present difficulties between the Church and State are not a new phenomenon. Historically there has been differences between the goals, both secular and spiritual, of religious organisations and those of the government of the day. I shall return to this point later. Nor should the reasons for the apparent increase just be sought in the last fifteen years. Structural changes within British society have accelerated during the twentieth century, especially post 1945, and some of the consequences are now beginning to become apparent.

Since the middle of the nineteenth century the importance of the Church in society has been increasingly chipped away by the growth in social legislation enacted by governments



of varying political persuasions. Its traditional roles of providing education, relief for the poor, and comfort for the distressed, have become increasingly prerogatives for state agencies governed by statutory obligations. This process has accelerated since 1945 with the creation of the welfare state. Whilst such provisions are generally supported by church leaders it has undermined their position as the core or bedrock of communities. People no longer turn to the church but to the state when they are in difficulty. The rights that the welfare state has provided has helped to fuel an increase of opportunities for people, and a consciousness whereby acceptance of one's lot is rejected in favour of demands for change and improvement. Hence Christianity is less of a solace for earthly problems. Faced with these developments Christian church leaders have had to restate and redefine their role against the backdrop of a society that has increasingly less regular connection with Christianity, and more secular remedies for its problems.

The growth in the role of the state, together with the strengthening of liberal individualism, has produced an increasingly secular society. Ideas of community have been undermined by individual rights, with entitlement not subject to many of the rigours of reciprocal obedience. The state increasingly treats its citizens as agents stripped of their moral and cultural baggage, whilst its institutions become enabling agencies reinforcing such a liberalistic view. Religion is a matter of personal choice, and as such it is consigned to the personal sphere. Particular religious values are not promoted, preferences are seen as a matter of choice. The Church of England in particular has had to struggle with this secularisation, in a number of interrelated ways. The nature of the Church is to guide and respond to British society. With an increased secular society its role is having to be re-examined. The dialogue it now has with society is less concerned with



spiritual issues, and hence the Church is becoming involved much more readily in secular debates. Also, because people are less religiously literate the Church is being forced to re-examine how it presents its message, and hence there has been intense debate over the structure and form of services and rites. Finally, they can no longer look to the institutions of the state for support of Christian ideals, eg the Christian component in education has lessened so that now it is almost non-existent. Whilst there is a legal requirement that religious education should be of a mainly Christian content, it is often studied in a comparative manner.

The problems that the Christian Church has faced in Britain due to the above structural changes in society were compounded by the election of the Conservative Party in 1979. The rhetoric of Margaret Thatcher challenged the post-war consensus and threatened to role back the boundaries of the state. Whilst the welfare state had produced challenges to the Christian churches there was and is a strong commitment to its ideals and practices. Hence there was resentment to the idea of cutting welfare provision. Allied to this was disagreement over economics. Within "Thatcherism" there was a division between the creation of wealth and its use; that the outcome of markets cannot be unjust. Margaret Thatcher did qualify this by saying that "it is not the creation of wealth that is wrong but love of money for its own sake. The spiritual dimension comes in deciding what to do with the wealth."<sup>35</sup> The task of what to do with wealth was not a task for government or the state, as there was no general agreement on just distribution. It was a matter for personal choice, responsibility and charity. For some within the Church, such a position reinforced the idea of secularism as Christianity was banished to the periphery, becoming a mere matter of choice, relegated to the private sphere. Indeed, such an argument was used in the debates over Sunday

trading. Religious observance was a matter of personal choice; if that choice continued to exist after the abolition of rules governing Sunday trading then the spiritual health of the nation would not be weakened.<sup>36</sup>

Thus structural changes within British society, coupled with the election of a government committed to individualism and free market economics provided a challenge to the very meaning of an Established Church. I now wish to examine how the Anglican Church in particular has responded to both of the above challenges.

One of the main changes in the Church of England has been in the social origin and class of the clergy. From the 1960's onwards there has been a widening of the social pool from which the clergy have been drawn. There has been an increase in lower-middle class and working-class clergy. This change has been reinforced by the weakening of the financial rewards for joining the ministry, with the value of the stipend declining in the second half of the twentieth century compared to other middle-class groups.

This change is now becoming reflected in the composition of the episcopacy. As Medhurst states, bishops cannot be thought of as being part of the ruling elite of society.<sup>37</sup> Since an agreement between Church and State in 1976 there has been less political involvement in choosing Bishops. Those appointed have increasingly come from theological colleges, rather than academia or heads of public schools, and have increasingly stressed their pastoral role rather than their role as supreme leaders in Christianity. Because of their social class, and often through their experience, Bishops tend to have more of an interest with social issues, and can relate to clergy working in eg areas of social deprivation. This change is perhaps exemplified by the present Archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey, who is the son of a hospital porter, and left school at sixteen.



The increasing secular nature of British society lead to demands within the Church of England for self-government. In 1970 the General Synod was established, with elected Houses for the Clergy and the Laity. Whilst this has appeased critics of the Church structure by making it appear more democratic and participatory, it has also contributed to the changing nature of the Church. It has been claimed that those who seek election to the Synod have formed a specialised theological elite, who support the demands for change found within areas of episcopal leadership, and who were and still are critical of Conservative social and economic policy. However, this group does not reflect many, if not the majority of parishioners who have a much more conservative approach to change, many of whom supported the Conservative Party.<sup>38</sup>

The influence of social change and secularisation has also influenced the Church with regards to theological thinking. Church leaders have moved away from ideas of the ceremonial endorsement of the state, and the triumphalism of Christian values, instead stressing ideas of reconciliation, both domestically and internationally. Hence there is acknowledgement of the victims of war and oppression, rather than celebration of victory. This was highlighted over the service to commemorate victory in the Falklands war. There has also been increased involvement in social issues, publicly highlighting the suffering of certain groups-and criticising government policy.

The increased dialogue with a secular society has been reflected in less of a collective voice on Christian doctrine and teaching. The questioning of the certainty of moral epistemology found within society, coupled with the growth in individualism, has been reflected in the Church. The Christian faith has become a matter of personal pronouncement and understanding, with individual clergy willing publicly to question areas of Anglican orthodoxy.



The most well known of these perhaps being the former Bishop of Durham, David Jenkins. Thus the Church has appeared to exhibit the moral uncertainty and lack of purpose found within society, and this has called into question the faith of its parishioners and its role in society.<sup>39</sup>

From the above discussion it can be argued that the Church has reflected many of the political changes that have happened in modern Britain. This has been reflected in the widening of the social recruitment of clergy, the democratizing of more areas of its management, and the increase in debate and questioning of its purposes and beliefs. I now wish to examine the consequences of these changes, and in particular the Church's response to certain doctrinal and political issues that have brought them into conflict with conservative politicians and theorists.

As has been stated the Church has been forced to respond to the political developments that have taken place in British society in the twentieth century. They have also responded to world events as well. Hence they have had to come to terms with the challenge placed before Christianity by the growth both of liberalism and Marxism. The claim is offered in many quarters that the Church of England in particular has become too influenced by liberal ideas. Hence the Church has become increasingly willing to support pluralism of values, ideas of equality, the toleration of other religious beliefs, and the affirmation of other cultural practices in British society. It is also claimed that those clergy who grew up during the 1960's have incorporated many of the humanistic ideas on human perfectibility into their beliefs and teachings even though they are in contradiction to Christian ideas on the imperfection of mankind and salvation through Christ. Hence the criticism that the Church has failed to take a lead on moral issues is seen by some as evidence of the inculcation of liberalism and its

belief in moral pluralism.

Similar criticisms are made that certain Anglicans have been too willing to accept Marxist ideas and values. This has been reflected in the calls for radical social and economic change, and in their involvement and endorsement of international Christian organisations. Claims about the influence of Marxism were directed at the report, *Faith in the City*, and its call for action over poverty and inequality<sup>40</sup>. Whilst such claims have been rebuffed,<sup>41</sup> the methodology was attacked by some theorists for placing too much stress on social and economic causation, at the expense of individual responsibility.<sup>42</sup> The influence of Marxist ideas has also permeated into the Anglican Church through its involvement with international organisations such as the World Council of Churches. The World Council of Churches it is claimed is heavily dominated by socialist programmes, and this is illustrated in its emphasise, eg on collective rights, institutionalised violence, and the use of violence to overthrow oppressive regimes. The Church of England has also become involved in the Marxist inspired Liberation Theology movement. This movement believes that God favoured the poor, and that it is the task of Christian theology to give support to this belief, and for the Church to be actively involved in it. This process of liberation involves developing social awareness through ideological education. Such ideas were endorsed by the Church of England's Board of Education in 1973.<sup>43</sup>

The influence of the above ideologies on Church thinking has been mirrored by increased involvement in "political issues". The Church has made pronouncements on international concerns, but perhaps the biggest cause of tension has been its reports on social problems, with a nadir being reached over the publication of *Faith in the City*. The involvement of the clergy in social issues is of course nothing new. What is different is that these reports



are not the work of individuals, but are given Church approval. Tension was heightened during the 1980's because of differing conceptions of social justice and equality held by the Church of England, and other mainstream Christian Churches, and the Conservative Government. The Churches believed that one of the key ways that poverty needed to be addressed was through the redistribution of wealth and increased public expenditure by the state. The Government argued against this position claiming that the outcome of free markets was not in effect a moral issue. There is no "just" allocation of resources, because there is no possible way to reach agreement over would constitute a just allocation of resources. The most beneficial arrangement for society was an unhindered economy.<sup>44</sup>

The tension over social justice is essentially a political debate, and hence one which has allowed the opponents of the Church's position an easy line of attack. Critics can claim that the defence of social justice cannot be derived from Christian doctrine, but is the adoption of a liberal\social democratic principle. This highlights a problem for the Church, forcefully made by Plant. Namely that the Church lacks a political theology, and consequently is forced to adopt secular principles when making social and political statements. Such principles lack the value of ultimate and objective truth to be found in the Christian religion, and immediately lays the Church open to the attack of adopting a secular political position, which has little religious basis.<sup>45</sup>

The Church's adoption of liberal ideas has also be seen in its pronouncements on religious education in schools. Despite its tradition and involvement in education the Church is increasingly reticent in wishing to promote the teaching of Christianity in state schools. This was highlighted in *Faith in the City*, where multiculturalism was endorsed, without questioning the respective cultures



or defending the truth of Christianity. Such a position again relegates Christianity to a matter of personal choice.

The Church of England's responses to changes in society has also affected its doctrine and style of worship. The liberal rationalist influence, with its ahistorical approach and demands for relevance and justificatory evidence, is symbolised, according to its critics, in the relegation of the Book of Common Prayer within Anglican worship, and its replacement by the Alternative Service Book. David Martin gives twelve reasons used within the Church to justify liturgical change.<sup>46</sup> Essentially the Church is concerned that its services should not appear antiquated, both in language and in reflecting past values, which are deemed culturally influenced\dependent, middle-class and sexist. That traditional liturgies are too difficult for many to understand and should be made more accessible by using contemporary language and idioms. There is also a disliking of the state prayers by those unhappy about the concept of an Established Church. Hence there is a desire for common prayers that can be shared by all practising Christians of whatever church, and, increasingly, of whatever nationality. Liturgies and creeds should also reflect changes and developments in moral attitudes eg with regard to sex and marriage. Previous forms place too much stress on sin and atonement, and not enough-on the Holy Spirit and resurrection. Finally there is in some quarters a demand to reject the aesthetic in worship, claiming that this is a false diversion from the true meaning of Christianity.

One of the clearest examples of the effect the questioning and revision of doctrine and practice has produced is with regards to feminism and the role of women in the Church of England. The claim that the Church is a patriarchal establishment, and that this is reinforced by sexist

liturgies, and the limited role women could take in the structure of the Church, has to a considerable degree been taken on board by its leaders, culminating in the ordination of women priests. Similarly liturgies can be amended by the clergy so as not to include supposed sexist language.

The above changes have been met with opposition, and in some cases disbelief, by many conservatives. I now wish to examine their critique of the Church's actions, before exploring the political consequences of this conflict.

An obvious point of criticism for the conservative is the adoption by the Church of England of liberal, and in some cases Marxist, philosophies. Powell and Norman's ideas are obviously key in this area. They claim that Christianity is incapable of providing support for any political action, as its essential purpose is redemption in another world. As Norman states,

"It may well be that liberalism is perfectly acceptable for all kinds of political and moral reasons: my contention is simply that there are no distinctly *Christian* reasons for regarding its principles as more compatible with the teachings of Christ than other and rival political outlooks. Church leaders seem unaware of the problem."<sup>47</sup>

The ideas of religious pluralism, endorsed by the Anglican Church, do appear to be a restatement of a core dilemma for liberalism. Namely that in order to have moral pluralism, a general agreement on pluralism must exist. The liberal idea of toleration is by definition defenceless when confronted by the intolerant. Hence religious pluralism in Britain is dependent on Christian ideas of toleration. The Church, in its willingness to affirm other faiths, may be recognising religions which are unwilling to reciprocate. The Islamic religion is one such faith that finds the concept of pluralism and relativism contrary to its beliefs.



A further conservative criticism of the liberal stance is that it challenges the truth of Christianity, and its central position in the life of the believer. Those Anglicans who adopt a liberal stance relegate Christianity to a matter of personal choice, relevant only to the private domain.

The Church's dialogue with Marxists is even more difficult to justify. Marxism is committed to the material redemption of man, and his liberation from oppression. Christianity is part of that oppression and will consequently be overthrown with the overthrow of the capitalist means of production. Hence while Christianity may share some ideals with regards to eg poverty, and the moral worth of human beings, their conceptions of human nature and their respective goals are diametrically opposed. "In giving their support to Marxists, Christians's are committing not only a theological mistake but are also actively contributing to the destruction of their own beliefs."<sup>48</sup>

The acceptance, be it passively or actively, of liberal and Marxist ideas has been reflected in the Church's increasing involvement in debates over poverty and other social issues. This involvement has come under attack from conservatives from a number of positions. The most obvious coming from the thesis found in the Powell\Norman approach to Christianity that it cannot provide the basis for a political theory or wide-ranging political reform. Powell attacks many of the reports the Churches have produced on social issues, not because of their poor quality, but that the authors "are doing so as *Christians*, which endows what they have said and written with the claim or implication of authority - papal, episcopal or clerical."<sup>49</sup>

The readiness to take on political ideas in place of Christian principles is also attacked. As Anderson and Harris state:



"Not for the crusaders anything as vague as the *banner of love unfurled* or as traditional as a *considered* theology of man and creation. The enemies are clearly defined by sentiment, secular ideology and the newly found social sciences. All that remains is to join battle with the forces of oppression."<sup>50</sup>

When reference is made to Christian ideas, the claim is that it is often wrongly interpreted. Not only does this cause one to question the scholarship and motivation of those writing the reports, it also highlights the above point that there is no clear political position to be derived from Christianity. Flew cites the example of the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke, X, 25-37) which is quoted in *Faith in the City*. According to Flew, this example is used to give credence to the injustice of inequality, and the moral necessity of redistributing wealth to help the poor. Flew questions this interpretation claiming that the Samaritan acted with his own money through charity. IT gives no support to state redistribution, but does support individual conscience and love of neighbour as a voluntary action.<sup>51</sup>

The reports on social issues produced by the mainstream Christian Churches receive criticism as well their poor use of empirical data, their lack of understanding of the methodological issues involved, and their willingness to take on political opinions and conclusions uncritically. Those reading the reports are urged to do so with these criticisms in mind. As Anderson and Harris state:

"Bluntly, if the Churches are to comment on specific and controversial socio-economic issues, they should work harder at being informed and scrupulously even-handed. Their publications are variously found to be sloppy, ill-thought out, ignorant, one-sided, addicted to secular fashions, uncritical of conventional *progressive* wisdom, hysterical, unmethodical in the use of sources and evidence, theologically desiccated and, most deplorable, uncharitable to those who disagree. If the first principle of morality is,

following Pascal. to work hard at thinking clearly, they could be said to be lacking in moral weight."<sup>52</sup>

In Flew's discussions on social reports he raises questions over cogency of the arguments often employed on issues of injustice and inequality, and on issues of causation. He claims that the authors of *Faith in the City* in particular confuse inequality with injustice and poverty. He argues that inequality is not by definition unjust, nor does it by definition have to cause or maintain poverty. He argues that the authors accept uncritically an acceptance of the concept of relative poverty, and that consequently inequalities must be lessened by state action. Thus he claims that there is an inaccurate collapsing of the philosophy of the Good Samaritan and the philosophy of Procrustes, who wished to make everyone equal, even if this involved force.<sup>53</sup>

A further confusion arises over ideas related to causation. Flew argues that the Churches are increasingly keen to deny individual free will and responsibility, preferring the inevitability of social and economic determinism. For example, discussions on the breakdown in the nuclear family stress its inevitability in contemporary society whilst denying that individuals, usually males, decide to leave the unit. Such a position would appear to be in conflict with Christian doctrine, whereby the decision to follow Christ is free choice open to all persons, and that judgement will be based on the decisions people have made in their lives.

According to Flew social causation theory blurs distinctions that can be made over the term cause. If I physically compel X to do something (Y) then it can be rightly said that I caused event Y to happen, and that X had to choose. If I tell X something and as a result they choose to do action Z, then it can be claimed that I caused



them to do Z, but not in a physical sense. An element of free will and choice exist. In performing action Z, agent X is making a rational choice about all the possible alternatives. When questioned they must give justificatory reasons, which, in order not to be reproached, must be deemed acceptable. The above use of social determinism does not make this distinction clear. Hence the inevitability of family breakdowns is an oversimplification denying individual decision making, and not separating the reasons for the breakdown. The moral appraisal of such reasons would appear to be within the boundaries of Christian theology.<sup>54</sup>

The involvement in the production of reports on social and political issues is, according to some commentators, changing the nature of the Church. By taking part in debates, the Church is appearing to abandon its position in defending theological truths, and is instead resembling a secular pressure group, in competition with other issue groups. This moral weakening of the Church is also apparent in its involvement in religious education.

Religious education is a key issue for many conservatives. British society has become increasingly secular, and hence there is less exposure to Christian values and teaching in everyday life. Against this backdrop the Church of England in particular has been found wavering in taking an active stance in filling this breach.

"Clergy feel intimidated by liberal distaste for prescribing propaganda; yet this is a world of propaganda, and if christians do not supply their own nobody else will. The human community is given over to a compendium of ideologies: Christians are dangerously uninstructed in theirs."<sup>55</sup>

The consequences for this lack of involvement in education is of ultimate seriousness for the Anglican Church. As Norman states:



"There is no automatic reason why children uninstructed in religious doctrine should feel the need for a religious dimension to their lives."<sup>56</sup>

Conservative philosophers of an atheist nature, such as Flew, agree with this assertion.<sup>57</sup>

In 1985, the Conservative Government adopted the proposals of the Swan Report, which concluded that as Britain was a multicultural society, then religious education and worship in schools should reflect this and endorse differing faiths equally. This position was opposed by Evangelical Christians, and Muslims, as forcing on them liberal secular values. It was challenged in 1988 in the House of Lords by Baroness Cox, and resulted in what is known as the Cox amendment. This stated that there was to be a daily act of worship in state schools of a "mainly Christian character", and that Religious Education was to become part of the National Curriculum. Despite these requirements, the affirmation of Christianity is by no means assured, and can be dependent on the political complexity of the relevant county councils, and on the membership of the local Standing Advisory Council on Religious education.

The Anglican Church in particular has received criticism for its lack of guidance and support for a Christian emphasis in religious education, with many clergy supporting a multicultural approach.<sup>58</sup> Such an approach undermines the truth in Christianity, and hence undermines the faith of believers. It also questions the validity of Christian mission work. Religious belief is relegated to a personal choice, with the Church again moving to the periphery.

As was stated above, the Church of England has felt the need to "modernise" its services and liturgies in an attempt to become more relevant to contemporary society. These revisions have come under fierce attack from many

conservatives. Traditionalists argue that worship must stimulate both our intellects and emotions, evoking an image of a transcendental God. Reformers within the Church reject this position placing emphasis on community and participation, eg sharing the Peace. Worship is designed to cater for human needs, rather than giving people a chance to transcend their everyday existence. Hence the need to produce services to respond to all types of individual experiences.

The effect of these changes can be to produce services that lack interest and stimulation to the intellect, or to produce banal and trivial services. Similarly art and music is not used to reinforce the spiritual, but to simulate worship by producing false emotional responses, or in entertaining in childish manners. The result is that "there is no sense of obligation, of the duty of supporting local institutions because they are visible embodiments of universally held truths...The trouble is that modern religion does not engage the whole personality."<sup>59</sup>

The movement to reform the liturgy is met with a similar defence. There is a need for a religious language as what is said and performed in services cannot be easily stated, if at all, in plain language. There is an analogy with aesthetics, and music in particular, in that what is being performed and expressed cannot be subject to rigorous analysis and elucidated in a simple manner. According to Powell, "the language of worship and rite is in itself *sacramental*; that is to say, it is more than, and different from, its natural sense....we cannot voluntarily and intentionally construct it: it is, like so many of the other capabilities which make human life sustainable, *begotten not made*."<sup>60</sup>

Attempts at modernising liturgies and other religious language have also come under attack. Firstly it is unclear



what "modern language" actually is. For example it is argued that the Alternative Service Book makes use of language and syntax not in everyday use. It is also argued that many of the "translations" are of bad quality and change the original meaning and essence. A more extreme charge is that by changing the substance and form of service one is in effect changing the image of God that is manifest, and so changing the nature of the religion and hence creating a new one. In denying the value of the aesthetic component in traditional Anglican worship one may be opening up the Church to new believers, but one is also potentially alienating existing members.

Nor is it clear that the language of the Church and the form of its ceremonies should reflect what is going on in society. Some critics make use of Wittgenstein's arguments on language games, claiming that religion, and Anglican Christianity in particular, is one such language game, with specific rules that govern the use and meaning of the words. Many people need and enjoy expressing their spiritual side in a different language, and in a different location, to everyday existence. This does not make it exclusive, but requires learning and initiation through practical experience in the same way that any other language is learnt.<sup>61</sup>

The question asked by some conservatives is why has this reform- taken place, and at an increasing rate, if, according to a number of surveys, parishioners do not want to see it happen. Martin claims that it has been supported out of acts of desperation to increase Church numbers. That one recorded success of a charismatic congregation is lauded and magnified, with many reticent to challenge the findings.<sup>62</sup> Powell claims that it is a deliberate attack on the authority of the Church.<sup>63</sup> Chapman supports this idea<sup>64</sup>. He claims that the Book of Common Prayer is disliked by some within the Church because it challenges



them too much. It offers the rules to be observed by the clergy and the laity, and it places emphasis on sin and redemption. This challenges those who support multicultural, multifaith ideas, and who subscribe to the rigours of political correctness; one person's sin may be another's virtue. Hence there is an intellectual movement challenging authoritative statements on the correct way to live. By undermining the doctrines of the Church, there is produced a diversity (anarchy) of forms of worship, with belief becoming one's own experience and interpretation.

The demand for change in the style and content of worship is also forthcoming from the feminist movement. Indeed their strength as a pressure group was exemplified by their success in achieving the ordination of women priests in 1994. Many conservatives were disillusioned by this measure, and left the Church of England. Their objection to female ordination, and the pressure to reform liturgy so as to remove "sexist language" is once again based on religious and philosophical grounds.

Some argue that the creation of women priests breaks with the Catholic tradition of the Church, and questions the role of the Apostolic Succession. Other critics claim that it contradicts scripture and the experience of Christ's ministry. Terry quotes from eg Paul's letter to the Corinthians, Timothy and Titus. The evidence quoted makes claims about the role of women as mothers and wives, supporting their husbands. He also highlights how Jesus was a man, as were his apostles, and how the argument that the incarnation and selection were culturally and time dependent does not offer a very credulous argument. Not only does it question the omnipotence of God, but it would also imply that Christ died only for his generation.<sup>65</sup> Porter argues that as the celebrant at the eucharist is an icon of Christ, then the celebrant can only be male as Christ was a man.<sup>66</sup>

Feminists also wish to see the structure and rites of the church reformed. This is necessary so as to remove the patriarchal aspect of the traditional Christian Churches. More extreme feminists wish to deny the maleness of God and Christ, rejecting the incarnation as sexist and the last supper as a denial of the Christian ministry. In some cases Scripture is abandoned altogether. In Manchester Cathedral the image of *Christa* was paraded as a symbol of what the Church has crucified by suppressing women. For some critics this amounted to heresy.<sup>67</sup> Similarly, some of the changes in liturgy, especially those used by feminists in the American Episcopal Church, change the whole meaning of the Anglican tradition and in effect create a new religion.

Conservatives claim that the inspiration for these changes once again come from secular society. That many of those demanding change do so out of demands for equality, rather than on theological grounds. The perceived strength of the feminist lobby is such that Church leaders have been reluctant to oppose it for fear of being out of step with women's demands in society.<sup>68</sup>

The apparent willingness to change services and rewrite liturgies is linked to other changes within the Church of England, notably the closer ties with other Christian churches. Martin claims that this is part of the suspicion that some in the Church have over its established nature. They dislike the attachment to land, place and people, instead preferring the idea of religious integration.<sup>69</sup> Conservatives criticise the emphasis on ecumenism because of its apparent questioning and willingness to abandon Anglican doctrine. Clark highlights this in his discussion of the Porvoo Declaration and Common Statement, which commits the Church of England to create ecumenical links with the Nordic and Baltic Lutheran Churches. If the Church of England were to "integrate" with these Churches then



they would be abandoning the belief in the Apostolic succession, as this was broken in Denmark, Norway and Iceland<sup>70</sup>.

Those Anglicans who wish to see the Church of England disestablished, reformed, and more in control of their own affairs are subject to stern conservative criticism. By disestablishing the Church it becomes one church among many. It loses its central position within the nation. British culture and tradition, of which it is a key part, is questioned, and in so doing, undermined. Anglican Christianity is reflected in law, the constitution of the state, and in common and high culture. If its centrality is removed then people will not necessarily be exposed to its teachings and values. This is important in maintaining our sense of identity and shared moral language. It is important even if people become ambivalent towards their belief in God later in life; the input and effect of this knowledge will still be with them and will still have an influence on their moral natures. Hence Christian values are part of the British moral culture. They provide the "theoretical" input to an ethical system that is culturally formed and dependent. They are not abstract universal principles, but can be experienced in our everyday lives.

The removal of the Church from its central position is already becoming apparent to some conservatives. Ideas about - sin - and personal responsibility have become questioned and rejected by groups within society, eg in the apparent denial of responsibility for their actions by young men in fathering children, reflected in the rise of never married mothers dependent on state support. Scruton claims that high culture is also suffering because of "religious illiteracy", in that it is becoming increasingly difficult to teach English literature at higher levels, as the significance of religious mores and imagery is lost on the students. They are no longer studying something that is



a part of their identity. "The teacher of English literature is forced into the position of his colleague teaching Chinese, who must explain the allusions of Confucius in the poetry of Lao Tzu, while knowing that Confucius has no real significance in the lives of his students, except as a name in the footnotes to Lao Tzu."<sup>71</sup>.

I now wish to examine the cogency of the conservative approaches to religion and Christianity, as well as assessing the validity of their criticisms of the Church of England.

The most apparent difficulty in the conservative approaches to religion that I have outlined is that there appears to be considerable differences between their positions, and in the case of Scruton, within a particular theory. It is by no means apparent why these approaches should be reconcilable. It would be wrong to see each approach as completely separate; there is a degree of overlapping and shared values in a Wittgensteinian sense. Scruton defends the idea of spirituality, without explicitly justifying Christianity, relating his defence to aesthetics. He also argues for the necessary link between religion and politics, with politics controlling and utilising Established Christianity. Oakeshott argues for its value in providing the moral completion for man within a civil arrangement. Religion directs the spiritual but its content is determined by pragmatic considerations, not by truth. Nor is a particular form to be controlled by the state; there are no core values. For Norman and Powell Christianity is true, based on the Scriptures, and leads to man's salvation in another world. For traditionalists such as Martin, its content is given through the Scriptures and through the liturgical rites of the Church of England. Anthony Flew does not believe in God but supports Christianity for the values it endorses which are of social

benefit, especially personal responsibility and sin.

It would appear that the positions outlined above do not accommodate each other's beliefs in any depth. There may be surface agreement eg on issues to do with changes in the style of worship in the Church. They may all object to persistent reform but for different reasons: Scruton could object because the changes in service undermine both the aesthetic component of Anglicanism, and alter the role of the Church in society. An Oakeshottian might object because the changes were too rapid and outside of the tradition of the religion, causing believers to feel alienated from their moral arrangement. Norman may claim that such changes involve a questioning of scripture and a denial of Christianity. The objection is constant within the approaches but the justifying grounds can be very different. For a traditionalist there are core values in Christianity and the Anglican Church; For the Oakeshottian there are no such core values. Again for the traditionalist Christian worship is about truth; for Scruton it is about spiritual fulfilment through aesthetic intimation.

Such difficulties have consequences for political action. Whilst there might be agreement in bemoaning the decline in Christian belief in British society, there may be little agreement over what to do in practice due to the underlying theological tensions. For example Scruton has argued that politics should become involved in rejuvenating Christianity in society. Powell and Norman are against the involvement of religion with politics, especially identifying Christianity with a particular political theory. These tensions would become manifest in controversial political areas. eg Scruton might argue that the Church should be involved in the moral condemnation of never-married mothers. Powell might support this position politically, but would not wish to draw his objection from Christianity. Whilst traditional Christianity supports the



nuclear family, there is also a hesitancy in condemning earthly sin. Judgement for Powell is other-worldly. It is not apparent how these two positions could be philosophically reconciled.

There are also difficulties and inconsistencies within the work of individual theorists. There does appear to be a confusion, and possibly a change within the work of Scruton on religious belief. As was discussed above Scruton's later work is characterised by the defence of religion on Kantian grounds as essential to the sense of the moral and the completion of the human person. Yet in earlier work he claims that: "Faith, which fills the world with meanings, leans too precariously upon an unjustifiable metaphysical claim."<sup>72</sup> He has a further difficulty when deciding how to arrest the decline of religion. Again, as was mentioned above, in *The Meaning of Conservatism* he defends the importance of the Established Church within the political arrangement in providing *consoling myths* to its congregation, so as to help them in coming to terms with their existence, inculcating moral values, and contributing to the sense of nationhood. Its demise as an institution was of worry to the state and may need political action to remedy the situation. Yet elsewhere he claims that:

"The restoration of the sacred may be a political hope, but it cannot be a political task: to make it one is to risk the most violent cataclysm and the collapse of liberal political institutions."<sup>73</sup>

Not only does Scruton have this apparent contradiction in his work, it is also interesting that he wishes to defend liberal political institutions. Whilst he may be making a defence of British institutions that have allowed diversity within a cultural homogeneity, one of his criticisms of the Anglican Church is that it has become too liberal. The implication of this statement is that Scruton does not wish to see institutions enforcing a particular political



position, ie that he wishes there to be a plurality of values in society. Yet this is in contradiction with his wish to have a strong Established Church of England, performing the role he believes is of importance for the state.

Scruton has a further difficulty in the relationship between the state and religion. He states that politicians must take account of the religious beliefs of the people they govern.<sup>74</sup> This position would appear perfectly justifiable to the conservative if there was a prevailing Christian ethos in society. However, in contemporary Britain there are now sizable non-Christian groups eg Muslims. How then should politicians seek to reconcile their demands with Christianity. Islam does appear to be a major problem for Scruton and other conservatives writing in the *Salisbury Review*. As it is not part of Judaeo-Christian culture there is a resistance to defend and affirm its values.<sup>75</sup> Yet Muslims share an opposition to liberalism, and ethical relativism, with conservatives.

Perhaps the main difficulty with religion and the Anglican church for Scruton is that he does support their role in politics when it is involved in supporting the state and conservative values. He is critical of their role in politics when they wish to assert some form of autonomy, promoting their own intrinsic worth rather than as a support to the state, or when they offer critical comments or become involved in issues that he and other conservatives do not support.

There are also difficulties with the Powell\Norman approach to Christianity. Powell's position is I feel extremely difficult for conservatives who wish to stress the importance of Christianity. He continually asserts that the Christian message, as revealed in the scriptures is often paradoxical and essentially confused in offering us

guidance in how to act on earth. This immediately raises the point that if the scriptures are so confusing, can we actually know what Christ's message was and is; could we not be mistaken about man's salvation in heaven. Also if Christianity can offer no moral or ethical guidelines, then where does our notion of morality come from. There is a conception of something called Christian ethics, actions that we should or should not perform as Christians. There is a degree of historical continuity in these. If this has not been derived from the Scriptures then where has it come from. Is it as the Marxists would claim just the morality of the strong. For conservatives such as Scruton Established Christianity has an important social role to play. This would appear to bring him into conflict with Powell who would argue that it had no such social role.

If as Powell argues Christianity is supernatural and offers no advice on the ethical life, then it is not clear how we commit ourselves to God to achieve salvation. He does claim that what we do in the world is important, however he is vague in describing the way Christianity imposes itself upon us. His view on the confused nature of the Scriptures must mean that the formulation of creeds and liturgies is not particularly accurate or meaningful. However he also claims to profess "the doctrines set forth in the Book of Common Prayer and participates duly and cheerfully in the Worship of the Church of England."<sup>76</sup> The question can be asked why Powell acknowledges these doctrines as opposed to others, whilst acknowledging the difficulty of formulation.

Many people question Powell's theological approach and interpretations. If his approach can be questioned then this would seem to provide evidence for the claim that the nature of Christianity is such that varying interpretations are possible, as is the case with any textual analysis. If there is contestability in interpretation then it may be possible to argue for eg a Christian social ethic. Powell



seems unwilling to acknowledge this possibility.

There are also difficulties within the work of Norman. His defence of an ahistorical approach to Christianity can meet with two objections. Firstly history can be viewed as the unfolding of God's purpose; we can learn about God's will by examining how men have developed and lived by the teachings of Christ. Secondly there are certain facts about the life of Christ that are of fundamental importance to the Christian religion. For example, it must be an historical truth that Christ rose from the dead. If this is not true then Christ did not fulfil the teachings of the prophets, and his claims to be the Son of God can be disputed.

There are also difficulties for Norman in his defence of a pluralism. He argues for Established Christianity and for a pluralistic society, acknowledging the contradiction in this desire. However, as it works he believes that we should not change it or highlight and discuss it. Yet by stating this and wishing to defend it he is already taking part in that debate. If challenged he has to offer justificatory reasons, which are in turn subject to debates and refutation. His defence of pluralism would also seem to come into conflict with his attack on liberalism and the influence of the prevailing intellectual climate. In particular his claim that liberalism does not affirm all values equally, and that those who do not support the current liberal thinking on an issue eg racism, are subject to attack and exclusion can be labelled back at him. Whilst supposedly willing to affirm other values, Norman does wish to defend a particular framework of values within which the debate and alternative values exists. Hence his pluralism is somewhat restricted.

This problem for Norman is reinforced with regard to his comments found in *Christianity and the World Order* on



Christianity in the Soviet Union. As Corner points out, he endorses how Orthodox Christianity was confined to the ceremonial in the Soviet Union, and was not involved in social issues, yet he claims that he wishes to defend pluralism. In such a case religion appears to be reduced to little more than a ceremony or symbolic gesture, not a living faith.<sup>77</sup>

Norman is concerned to emphasise that Christianity can offer no support to a political theory or ideology. Haldane supports this general argument but claims that Norman over-emphasises it. He claims that there is a tension between the ethics of politics and religion; politics is essentially consequentialist, with all actions countenanced for the greater good, whereas religion wishes to make definitive statements on the rightness or wrongness of actions. Nevertheless, this should allow us to criticise particular policies which Christians feel are contrary to their beliefs. Norman appears reluctant to accept this.<sup>78</sup>

This difficulty is again present in Norman's apparent wish to draw lines between public and private morality, even though they are both concerned with human flourishing. If certain values are to be promoted at the expense of others, then, following Scruton's point, that this will have to be acknowledged by politicians and reflected in law. For example, if homosexuality is to be viewed as immoral, then it would have to be treated differently in law eg in prohibiting homosexual marriage. It immediately becomes a public and political issue. Such issues will not necessarily ally Christianity to any particular socio\political systems, but will allow for the Christian to become involved in the public domain to support private moral concerns.

One of Norman's main criticisms is that the Church has always been subject to the exposure of the prevailing

intellectual opinions in society. With a society that has become increasingly secular, and an intelligentsia increasingly influenced by liberal and Marxist ideas, the Church has been slow to respond to these challenges, instead taking on board many of their arguments, and changing their liturgies accordingly. At one level his claim does not seem that remarkable. There is a degree of inevitability that this will happen if the Church is to be Established and participating in the life of the state. He also defends this process when he acknowledges and supports the change and development of the Christian religion, as part of a tradition, through history.

Norman's view on relativism also appears to have difficulty in accommodating ideas around religious truth. As Plant states, Norman's views about God as Lord of history sit rather strangely with his historical relativism. If God is a judge of human history then it would seem to imply a right and wrong way of doing things, even if this is not clearly expounded to us. If it is impossible to know whether anything I do is in accordance with the will of God, then this makes the following of a Christian life somewhat indeterminate.<sup>79</sup> If it is this difficult to determine Christian truth then the claim can be made that we may have inherited a corrupt form or version of it.

If men are subject to relativism in their values then it would appear to be a distinct possibility that Christianity could be rejected or abandoned. If Norman believes in its truth, then he would want it defended against such challenges. However, this appears to be a political task which he does not wish to see Christianity become involved in. He has a related problem in his defence of pluralism, as this would appear to challenge his belief in the truth of Christianity and lay it open to attack, and consequently public defence, from other values.



The views of Oakeshott on religion and Christianity are also problematic. Oakeshott exhibits a vagueness over Christian belief that is similar to Powell's pronouncements. For Oakeshott Christianity is essentially what we do as moral agents. There is little we can say that is part of the Christian religion, with the possible exception of the account of Christ's life. Christianity is constantly changing within a tradition of shared values and expectations. The problem for this approach is the response needed if this consensus no longer exists. Oakeshott appears sceptical that this will happen; some may argue that it already has. The question to be levelled at the Oakeshottian is what is their response to this dilemma.

Given Oakeshott's views on the state, the restoration of the Christian Church is not a task for Government as this would turn it from a civil association to an enterprise association. Nor is it the task of philosophy to take part in the debate. The purpose of philosophy is to explain, not to take part in the practicalities of politics. Hence an Oakeshottian account of the Christian Church is essentially descriptive, and applicable when there is cultural homogeneity, but seems to offer very little when this homogeneity is replaced by an ethos of moral pluralism.

The interest that Flew shows in religion is from the onset quite interesting in that he is an atheist. The Established Church, when performing the tasks that he thinks it should be is defended on utilitarian grounds. Indeed he sees no need to attack Christianity per se because of the strength of the secular values in society. Nevertheless, his keenness to defend moral virtues does not reconcile easily with his utilitarian approach to morality displayed in his support for the Church, as utilitarianism judges the worth of an action on its results, not in its intrinsic nature.

His methodological approaches are also of interest. Not



only does he criticise the quality of the social reports and proposals of the mainstream churches, he also questions the actual ability of collective\state action in addressing the problems described. It is individuals who should take more responsibility for their actions, and individuals that can make an impact on social problems through charity. This would bring him into conflict with conservatives such as Scruton who do see the restoration of religious and moral values as a political task. There is likely to be a further tension with Scruton arising out of Flew's philosophical approach to the social sciences. In many articles and books Flew is keen to make use of analytical method to examine theories of causation and falsification, in order critically to assess the claims that eg Church leaders are making over social problems and the responses to them. Flew's method is essentially to peel back the superfluous comments and political biases to reveal the inner realities. This is not a method that Scruton is keen to use when discussing political and moral problems, especially religion. He is much more keen to make use of myth in generating the appropriate moral responses and ideas of allegiance.

One of the prevailing conservative criticisms of the role of the Church in contemporary Britain is that it has become too involved in political\secular issues. This is a strange line of attack as the Church has always been involved in political issues.<sup>80</sup> eg the theories of Divine Right; the Henrician Reformation; Hooker's *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*; The *Rerum Novarum* of 1891. Norman does acknowledge the interaction between the Church and social intellectual ideas of the day. As he states in his study of Church and Society in England:

" The social attitudes of the Church have derived from the surrounding intellectual and political culture and not, as churchmen themselves always seem to assume, from theological learning. The theologians have always managed to reinterpret

their sources in ways which have somehow made their version of Christianity correspond almost exactly to the values of their class and generation."<sup>81</sup>

The change that has become apparent is that intellectual opinion has become more secular, and that the clergy are less upper-middle class. Members of the upper middle class tend to have a conservative view of life. Fewer members of the clergy now come from this class, and also have more interest in secular issues as opposed to traditional religious teaching. Consequently there are more clergy expressing non-conservative values. The Church has reflected this by becoming more ready to endorse these secular ideas, and to do so in the name of the Church and not as individuals. The official nature of these reports has caused criticism as it is felt that the statements have been formulated by an elite, whose values do not reflect mainstream opinion. Defenders of the Church may claim with some force that one of the main problems is that the Church is proposing solutions that run counter to conservative thinking. For example, Pope Leo XIII, receives a very favourable biography in *The Salisbury Review*, despite his authorship of the *Rerum Novarum* and criticisms of capitalism. This is because despite the reforms he proposed he was opposed to radical social transformation or revolution, instead preferring gradual reform and private ownership.<sup>82</sup>

The arguments over the ordination of women need some clarification, as there are two arguments opposing it from different grounds. For evangelical Christians the reasons against women priests are essentially Scripture based. For those within the catholic wing of the Church of England the opposition is based on the grounds that the Anglican Church is part of the Catholic tradition eg there was no break in the Apostolic Succession, and as the Catholic Church does not ordain women then neither should the Church of England.



This raises two interesting points. Firstly, it could be questioned whether the Anglican Church is part of English culture, as conservatives wish to assert, or is it part of a European religious tradition; something they wish to deny. It is also worth highlighting that should the Catholic Church issue a Magisterium in favour of the ordination of women, then catholic Anglicans should, in theory, drop their opposition, and no longer join forces on this issue with the evangelicals.

A final comment that I wish to make is on the conservative attempt to distance Christianity from politics. Oakeshott, Powell and Norman all claim that Christianity has nothing of value to say on politics. My contention is if this is true then is the converse true, that politics can have nothing to say on religion. Powell wishes to defend the Book of Common Prayer. The question can be raised, why? Powell's defence must take the form that it is the agreed method of worship. The response can be, "so what, we have now decided to have another one." Because Powell believes that the Christian message is so difficult to interpret, then he has little theological ground for a defence. Hence the need for Powell of a cultural homogeneity, so that this form of questioning on religious practices will not become a significant issue. This form of defence is also applicable to Oakeshott. The difficulty arises when cultural homogeneity is threatened or no longer exists. What then can Powell and Oakeshott do.

Despite their claims, Oakeshott, Powell and Norman are making political points; Powell and Norman's claim to be able to separate religion from politics is not true. There is a need for a particular religious\political tradition to sustain particular religious\Christian beliefs. T S Eliot made this point clear when he described a Christian society as

"a society in which the natural end of man -



virtue and well-being in community - is acknowledged for all, and the supernatural end - beatitude - for those who have eyes to see it."<sup>83</sup>

The dilemma for these theorists is how are they going to achieve such a society if, as according to Flew, religion is in terminal decline, and if cultural and moral homogeneity are far from apparent.

It is clear from the above discussion that conservative theorists still view the Christian religion as of great importance to man and society. It is also clear that there are a range of approaches and interpretations to Christianity and the Established Church. It is not clear that all these positions are easily reconcilable. The conflict with the Church of England in particular has become manifest because of long-term structural changes in the Church's personnel, and in their changing perception of ministry against the back-drop of an increasingly secular society. Conservatives are also worried about the decline in importance of Christian values in British society, and, to a lesser degree, the large-scale entry of other faiths. These changes are contributing to an undermining of British culture, which is of itself a political cause. Due to the diversity of philosophical positions adopted by conservatives, it is unclear what can be done to restore these values as a collective action. Whilst a superficial unity may be possible, it would seem likely that cracks would appear when issues became difficult or controversial.

It is interesting to consider the extent to which Christian values are no longer important in peoples' lives, and what the signs of the breakdown might be. Eliot writing in 1939 states that

"a society has not ceased to be Christian until it has because positively something else. It is my contention that we have today a culture which is mainly negative, but which, so far as it is

positive, is still Christian."<sup>84</sup>

Carroll identifies certain areas which exemplify the decline in religious sentiment. These include the breakdown of the family, the widespread acceptance of pornography, test-tube babies, declining integrity in business, a lack of spirit of community, and a general nihilism in high culture. However he balances this pessimistic catalogue by stating that in most democracies governments are still reasonably stable, law and order is respected, violent crime is not widespread, and that popular culture still displays a strong moral content. He explains this by claiming that there is a moral reservoir in society, which has been filled by successive generations and that religion is a key contributor to this stock. When religious attachments are lost the moral culture continues until the reservoir becomes dry. When this happens there develops a culture where everything is permitted.<sup>85</sup>

Conservatives fear this slow movement towards a moral drought and *the loneliness of the soul* that will develop due to the lack of satisfaction that will be felt by merely channelling one's activities into man's material needs. Others argue that the undermining of the Christian church, and in particular the Church of England, is part of a wider political goal, challenging the very concept of authority, in an attempt to undermine the basis of the state. As Powell state, "I suspect that we who maintain the Book of Common Prayer are fighting in a wider warfare than we can know."<sup>86</sup>



## NOTES

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## Chapter Five

### Conclusion

"It is difficult to accept that we live in a country whose Monarch is merely a well-paid citizen, whose Church is hostage to secular causes, and whose law is dictated by foreign bureaucrats. But how can we protest, when our nominal leaders advocate capitulation as the sole reasonable response?"

Editorial, *The Salisbury Review*, March 1993.

In the foregoing Chapters I discussed many of the areas of interest and concern that are featuring prominently in the contemporary writings of authoritarian conservative thinkers. Indeed, the fact that issues such as the family are being discussed so openly and vividly illustrates that conservatives do feel that there is a malaise or even a crisis in Britain, affecting the moral, social, cultural and political life of the Country. In this Chapter I wish to reflect on the issues previously covered, before going on to examine whether there is an overall project that authoritarian conservatives are attempting to enact.

Conservative philosophy places great reliance on the ideas of a shared culture and tradition, which provide us with the practical knowledge and wisdom needed by a people to live together harmoniously. It can be found in Burke's idea of prejudice, and within Oakeshott's views on the conservative disposition. Cowling unites varying strands or contributions to this theme under the title of *public doctrine*.

"A public doctrine is that loose combination of interlocking assumptions about politics, economics, science, scholarship, morality, education, aesthetics, and religion which constitutes the basis on which decisions are made about public matters."



Cowling argues that *public doctrine* is primarily informed by and reflects the religious values of society. Within England these values were associated with Christianity, and more specifically Anglicanism. These religious beliefs influenced discussions on subjects such as morality, politics and aesthetics, even if the authors were not strictly speaking Anglicans, or were even ambiguous on matters of faith or non-believers. Scruton supports this approach. He states:

"Like Cowling, I believe that you can understand a national culture only as an outgrowth of the religious impulse that first set it in motion."<sup>2</sup>

According to Cowling, the consensus over *public doctrine* in England was challenged in the nineteenth century, especially in the work of Mill, who he claims was hostile to Christianity, wishing instead to replace it with a belief in the value of liberty and an idealised conception of the rational autonomous individual<sup>3</sup>. Despite the prolonged attack on Christianity there is still a residue left of the values associated with English *public doctrine*, and there are still conservative thinkers contributing to the debate and attempting to reinforce its role in society, eg Scruton, Casey, Norman. The values and beliefs associated with it do not need to be articulated at all times to be effective, but there is a need for it to be stated when challenged. Hence the emergence of a journal such as *The Salisbury Review*, or an organisation such as *The Social Affairs Unit*, can be interpreted as coming to the defence of a traditional conception of public doctrine in Britain. Indeed, some of the commentators we have examined, especially on issues pertaining to the family, claim that such a doctrine has been overthrown, and a new consensus of values has emerged; values which undermine social stability. Cowling acknowledges this claim when he states:



"The sense of national identity that existed in Britain until at least twenty years ago, with its mixture of common memories, images and expectations, may in places already have been eroded; intelligence and skill will be needed if it is to be restored and, more important, extended to those who have never felt it."<sup>4</sup>

He hints, as has Scruton too, that conservatives have been too reticent and complacent to take on their opponents, publicly questioning their values and defending their own.

According to conservatives there are a number of reasons why this shared consensus has broken down. It should also be stated that whilst it is felt that this break down has accelerated over the past thirty years, many of its roots can be traced back much further. As was mentioned above, Cowling claims that it can be traced back to the nineteenth century, theoretically through the work of Mill, and practically with the extension of the franchise and the granting of equal rights and status to non Anglican religions<sup>5</sup>. Eliot, writing in the 1930's, claimed that Britain was moving away from its Christian religious and moral traditions<sup>6</sup>. The effect of the Second World War is also of importance. The Soviet involvement in the defeat of Germany perhaps produced a softer approach to communism, while social policy underwent a revolution with the construction of the welfare state and increased opportunities for education. One consequence of this increased state involvement in the lives of people was the decline in influence of the Church, and hence society began to take on an increasingly secular nature.

The above structural changes accelerated in the late 1950's and 1960's. Firstly there was the effect of large scale immigration into Britain, and mainly England, of people from the Caribbean, and then from the Indian sub-continent. Hence there were now sizable communities of people in Britain who were of a different race, a different religious tradition, and from a largely non European heritage.

Secondly, during the 1960's, there was an increased prominence of neo-Marxist and permissive ideas among the recently expanded student population in Britain and Europe. These people are now of an age to hold senior appointments in their vocations, and hence have the ability to influence debates in society. For conservatives this is of importance as the claim is made that many of these "disaffected" people gained employment in the entertainment and media industries. With the development of television and video technology the importance of these industries has rapidly increased, helping to shape public opinions and values. Hence the claim is made that the entertainment industry has helped to undermine traditional moral values, while the media has increasingly taken upon itself the role of conscience of society, producing biased accounts of events and attacking British institutions.

Thus it is argued by conservatives that the idea of a common culture and shared moral values is under attack. Indeed, the very idea of national identity is attacked from two conflicting directions: the claims of multiculturalism and moral pluralism in Britain; the ideas about universal rights and responsibilities on a global scale. The question now worth considering is why do Scruton and his supporters wish to challenge this changing conception of identity, when it is presented by some as almost inevitable?

Scruton supports Cowling's point that conservatives have been too hesitant in defending their beliefs and attempting to halt the tide of left\liberal values. Whilst the Oakeshottian approach to conservatism is possible when there is a strong shared consensus, it cannot readily address issues when this consensus is challenged and crumbling. Nor are politicians up to the task. Those best suited to defending the values which we trust and believe in are those who live by them: the everyday man, the educator and the priest. However these people are unwilling



to come forward for the fear of public ridicule they will receive at the hands of the media<sup>7</sup>. Those conservatives in the 1970's who became convinced by the arguments of free markets were right in their criticism of the corrupting influence of the state on the economy. However, they were wrong to extend these ideas to all areas of society; the freedom identified in the workings of the market requires a moral content that comes from a particular socio\political background. Scruton states that the two purposes for establishing *The Salisbury Review* were to separate conservatism from economic liberalism, and to provide cogent and intellectual arguments for the defence of the conservative position<sup>8</sup>.

Scruton's critique of the new values competing with the more traditional ones comes from three separate approaches. Firstly he is critical of the theoretical basis of both left-wing values and liberalism. For example, as was discussed in Chapter One, he attacks their conceptions of human nature and freedom, in particular criticising the abstract definition of human nature and the lack of a social and political content to freedom. He is also critical of the social and political consequences of their ideas. For example, the amoral and instrumental attitude to sexual desire and its undermining of the family mean that the inculcation of moral values into children will no longer happen, threatening the whole basis of the state. Finally, the experience of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe has played a large role in shaping his ideas. The suppression of academic discussion, the restrictions on high and popular culture, the destruction of the environment, and the economic mismanagement of these countries offered Scruton a picture of the final goal of those advocating unbridled freedom in personal morality, coupled with state regulation and control of all other areas of society.



Scruton's conception of human nature, its role in his philosophy, and the consequences it has for his views on morality immediately reinforces his definition of conservatism. Human nature is the foundation block for conservatives from which their political and social philosophy is built. For Scruton what differentiates man from other animals is rationality. Yet this rationality is not given but develops through social interaction, and in our ability to change our environment and create property. Similarly, our moral values cannot be formulated in abstraction through rational deliberation, but require a social component which allows the formulation of practical knowledge. This knowledge consists of moral attitudes that are based on moral beliefs, but with a motivational content. I believe X to be good because it accords with my nature as a rational being, subject to my own and others intentions, and because it is valued in my *Lebenswelt*.

This approach directly conflicts with contemporary liberal ideas on human nature. Within liberal thought there is a changing conception and prominence given to the role of human nature. Locke offers a comprehensive account of human nature, defending laws of nature which men should follow in order to fulfil God's purpose for them<sup>9</sup>. Within Mill's work there are still assumptions about human motivation, yet there is an increased prominence and value placed on the rational, autonomous individual<sup>10</sup>. In the twentieth century a liberal such as Rawls makes few assumptions about the nature of the individual he places behind his *veil of ignorance*. For Rawls the central value of the individual is his rational autonomy, which would be compromised if more features of an essential nature were introduced<sup>11</sup>. Rorty goes even further claiming that the concept of human nature is not useful, and

"is a remnant of the idea that the world is a divine creation, the work of someone who has something in mind, who Himself spoke some

language in which he describes his own project."<sup>12</sup>

Rorty wishes to deny any universal objective values in the world, instead stressing the contingency of human experience. The values we have shaping our lives are subjective and liable to rejection and change. The role for human nature is not as a foundation block from which to defend the liberal state; it is not external to the debate, but is involved in a circular argument with each giving justification to the other.

Liberals, albeit from a Kantian or Mill tradition, believe that moral principles can be formulated in abstraction, and that these principles are open to rational formulation and are universal. There is stress on the value of moral autonomy, and suspicion about the power of the state. The state should act as a neutral arbitrator and leave morality and the ordering of life down to the individuals that make up society. This suspicion of the power of the state is shared by Marxists. They argue that the prevailing economic system is reinforced by the state. Hence the alienation that man increasingly experiences, which is brought to a climax under capitalism, is institutionalised by the capitalist state. Man's true social nature can only be realised by the abolition of all systems of private ownership and the abolition of the state per se.

Scruton attacks the liberal approach to human nature, arguing that we cannot know man outside of a particular social arrangement and hence we cannot formulate in abstraction what moral principles should govern a society. As was discussed in Chapter One, he draws on the work of Hegel and Wittgenstein to defend this position. Scruton endorses Hegel's defence of property, both its role in helping to develop consciousness, and its moral role in providing a focus for rights and duties, and in providing a sense of historical continuity. Yet there is a problem



for Scruton if he defends the Hegelian position. For Hegel there is a right to property, although he is unclear about the economic conditions necessary to achieve it. If Scruton wishes to offer more of a practical understanding and defence than Hegel, he must be willing to address the amount of property needed, and its distribution. Two possible conclusions for Scruton are that there should be support for capitalism, and hence the ability to acquire private property, or that there should be support for social democracy and the redistribution of property, thus enabling people to have access to it. Within both Hegel and Scruton there are no theoretical limits about the amount of property one should possess. The only limits are those implicit in the lived way of life. For example if charities are a part of society then they should provide the basic property levels. However, if a charity provides property then this is no longer a right, whereas when the state provides property it becomes a right. Thus there are theoretical tensions between the claim of property as a right of the personality, and personality as an achievement through property.

Scruton and Casey stress the importance of the social environment in which we live when discussing their approach to ethics. They both believe in the objectivity of moral values, which are based on the shared understanding of our moral nature. The reasoning involved resembles that of aesthetic reasoning. To say that X is good I have to be able to offer reasons why. These reasons may reach an end point, but it should never entail me stating that "I think that X is good." If that point is reached then I have misunderstood the moral nature of X; if I merely state that "I think X is good" but cannot offer reasons why, then I am no longer making an objective moral statement. Instead I should argue to the point that "X is good because it is a value that the good man displays", thus reinforcing the claim to moral objectivity. If the person I am debating



with still challenges this statement, whilst acknowledging the logical cogency of my argument, then they are either challenging one of the premises, which is a different line of argument, or they are irrational. Hence the conservative case against the demands for moral diversity and multiculturalism.

This approach to morality of Scruton and Casey is not without problems, if, as they believe, there are challenges to an underlying moral consensus. Whilst their reasoning over moral issues may be sound, there is a difficulty if the initial premises of the argument are challenged; if there is no agreement on the good man. Scruton, following Wittgenstein, argues that there are no criteria of goodness, as there are criteria in other non-moral beliefs<sup>13</sup>. Hence it is unclear what method is available to the conservative to persuade his opponent about moral issues. The danger is that such debates will collapse into questions of utility, which Scruton and Casey would wish to avoid, as they defend a virtue based morality. All that is left is to appeal to images of virtuous behaviour in the hope that the picture evoked will change the beliefs and attitude of their opponent.

The method of evoking images of ideal ways of life is one that conservatives are not adverse to using. One of the most successful practitioners was Stanley Baldwin. He used images of traditional ways of life to create a picture of identity and solidarity among the British people. On discussing England he states:

"The sounds of England, the tinkle of the hammer on the anvil in the country smithy, the corncrake on a dewy morning, the sound of the scythe against the whetstone, and the sight of a plough team coming over the brow of a hill, the sight that has been seen in England since England was a land, and may be seen in England long after the Empire has perished and every works in England has ceased to function, for centuries the one eternal sight of England."<sup>14</sup>

Baldwin used such images of shared experiences and common heritage to defend certain characteristics of the English, Scottish etc. as a race or "stock". From this foundation he developed ideas of nationalism, and the duty of all citizens to be self-sacrificing to Britain, developing an ethic of public service. However, Baldwin was aware that such a sense of identity was not felt by all citizens.

"These are the things that make England, and I grieve for it that they are not the childish inheritance of the majority of the people today in our country."<sup>15</sup>

Such an approach is not without problems. There is a skill needed to be able to conjure such images without sounding simplistic or crass. Baldwin had such a skill; the opening quote would suggest that many conservatives are sceptical about the ability of many contemporary Conservative politicians. Secondly Baldwin had to contend with a far less critical media than now exists. Speeches such as these do not fit easily into the modern news formats, and would be subject to much critical analysis and ridicule by journalists. Finally there is, once again, the problem of a shared inheritance and morality. Baldwin could draw on the collective experience of the First World War, and the sacrifices that the whole population had made. He was also motivated by a strong Christian belief. He was critical of foreign ideas in politics, notably Bolshevism and Fascism, while at the same time stressing the importance of the Empire to Britain, stating that with it came duties and a sense of responsibility; moral standards must be maintained. He also defended traditional industries that respected their workers and rewarded loyalty, rather than entrepreneurs who were only interested in profit. It is a much more difficult task for the contemporary orator whose backcloth is one of moral and racial diversity, in an increasingly secular society, where market economics plays an increasingly important role in peoples' lives. He would



also lay himself open to attack from the liberal multiculturalist for excluding large groups of society and denying the universal nature of rights and duties.

One of the traditional inputs into moral reasoning in Britain has come from the established Church. In the preceding Chapter I discussed conservative attitudes to Christianity and the Church of England, as well as discussing possible reasons for its decline and conflict with conservatives. Some conservatives argue that the Church must stop becoming involved in social and political issues, as they lack the expertise to do so, and return to its role in promoting the Christian message of personal responsibility, sin and redemption. Others believe that the decline of the Church is such that it cannot be reversed. It was highlighted that within the work of Scruton there were differing positions on religion. In his early work he argued that the importance of religion was in its social function, and that it may become a political task to strengthen the Church of England. Writing in *Sexual Desire* he was more hesitant about a religious rejuvenation, fearing the political costs. While his present work places less emphasis on the idea of a civil religion, and more on the idea of the spiritual need in human beings, and how that should be reconciled by a community based religion. One reason for this changing approach is that he now believes that the Church of England is less significant, politically, than it was in the 1970's, and that the decline of its status can no longer be arrested<sup>16</sup>.

As a result of the increasing prominence of the idea of the perfectibility of human nature, and the decline in religious belief, British society has become subject to political hyperactivism. People no longer have a sense of the historical continuity of their lives, nor in the idea of a life after death. All that is important to them is their immediate surroundings and hence there is a desire to



use the state to address every perceived imbalance. The consequences of this phenomena are detrimental to society. There is increasing state involvement in the everyday lives of people, and as a result people expect the state to take more control over their lives. The powers of the state become more intrusive, and politics becomes dominated by groups competing to bring the attention of the state to their grievance and hence secure the resources to address it. Thus the public sector is constantly demanding increased funds<sup>17</sup>.

Authoritarian conservatives are critical of the Conservative Governments since 1979 because not only have they not sought to counter this tendency, but they have been willingly drawn into it. They should have realised that the more the state becomes involved in the complexities of the social organism, the more chance there is for it to make mistakes, and consequently they have to become even more involved to address the new problems cause by their actions. It also makes people more dependent on the state, and less motivated to sort out problems at a local level. People instead become *victims*, subject to inequalities that ought to be resolved by the state, usually at other peoples' expense<sup>18</sup>.

The lack of importance of an established religion is also reflected in the fervour that campaigners sometimes direct on their causes. Animal rights is one such area that conservatives feel is often pursued with an almost religious intensity; where the interests of animals are defended, sometimes at a cost too human well-being. The fundamental difference between human beings and animals is lost, with the cause taking over peoples' lives, affecting how they eat, dress, and generally live. Animal rights campaigners frequently take part in public acts of discontent and demonstration, which is likened to the religious need for shared worship with groups of fellow

believers. The pursuit of such causes can have a detrimental effect on society, as a momentum can develop with demands being made for radical action by the state. This can result in the polarization of views and a division among people, with a threat posed to traditional ways of life, e.g. the abolition of fox hunting.

One of the main areas of life which has experienced the effects of a loosening of traditional moral restrictions has been sexuality and sexual morality. In Chapter Two I looked at Scruton's conception of the nature of the sexual act. He argued that sexual desire was based around essentially two factors: the particularity of the object of attraction, and the element of the unknown found within that object. Sexual desire is not an immediate response, based on the fulfilment of sexual criteria, and culminating in an orgasm. It reflects instead our nature as rational beings. It is the result of interpersonal responses between a person of one sex and a member of the opposite sex, in an attempt to come to understand and know the nature of a person that we cannot inherently know, because of their opposite sex. It is a long term process culminating in the love of that person alone, whose reciprocal love contributes to our sense of fulfilment and happiness. It is an index of the state of our society and culture the more developed the forms that this process takes, and the more distinct our concepts of gender. Sexual liberation or promiscuity are deemed a perversion as they turn the object of our desire into a replaceable means to physical satisfaction. Indeed, any object could be a means to that satisfaction, eg animals. Such an account provides a defence of traditional morality for Scruton, based on chastity outside of marriage, faithfulness inside of marriage, and the creation of the family unit for the nurturing of children.

Scruton's account of sexual desire is both plausible and



convincing. The difficulty he may have provoked is that if he wishes to provide a philosophical account of sexuality and traditional morality, then he is immediately open to philosophical challenges and refutations. By the very act of taking part in debates over sexuality and sexual morality, traditional values have their practical role questioned, and their value as moral attitudes or Burkean prejudices is lessened. They instead become subject to academic discussions focusing on methods and purposes. The act of public debate also has the effect of desacrilising such values, allowing opponents the chance for public ridicule. These problems are apparent in Scruton's discussion of homosexuality. Whilst he wishes to condemn homosexuality his method does not make it easy for him to do so. He can attack the promiscuous homosexual, but not necessarily the monogamous couple. Scruton does acknowledge this difficulty. He suggests that rather than being required to provide the grounds of condemnation, those who wish to defend homosexuality should be asked to provide the arguments whereby it can be seen as the same as heterosexual desire. The fact that the idea of the unknown object of desire is missing from homosexual desire makes the act phenomenologically different from heterosexual desire. This, linked to the sexual nature of the male means there is an inherent tendency, especially among male homosexuals, towards promiscuity<sup>19</sup>.

In Chapter Three I examined many of the debates that are taking place in right-wing think tanks about questions of sexuality and morality, and their relation to the philosophical work of Scruton. The amount of debate on the social problems involved within this area justified Scruton's concerns and his philosophical discussion. It is argued by many taking part on policy debates that the breakdown of traditional sexual morality and roles has led to a weakening of the prominence of the nuclear family, and an increase in divorces and one-parent families. This in



turn has health and social costs on the adults and children concerned, with huge resource and financial demands being placed on the state to unsuccessfully address them. Despite the overwhelming evidence in favour of the nuclear family, a consensus has grown up defending *the changing nature of the family*, arguing for increased resources for single parents. This framework defending the value of lone-parenting has been influenced by neo-Marxist and feminist ideas, and has been promoted through articulate lobbying both through interest groups representing related issues, and through the media, especially television and radio. Conservatives have been slow to challenge this attack on traditional values.

The question is again, what should the conservative response be? As was discussed in Chapter Three conservatives have argued that the framework of beliefs defending the demise of the nuclear family should be challenged. Following the work of Flew this attack could take several directions. Firstly it should be questioned whether those wishing to defend changing nature of the family thesis are basing their beliefs on data about the results of these changes, or on their own political ideals. Within social research there can be a tendency to believe certain conclusions are true, or that certain evidence is false, because a person identifies with the social groups being examined. For example, if a person believes that the traditional family is oppressive to women and that its demise marks another step in their liberation, they may discredit findings about its detrimental effects on children etc. The conservative should highlight this tendency, as well as challenging their opponents to produce evidence to support their claims. Similarly conservatives should not be sucked into the arguments of social causation theory whereby, for example, sexual promiscuity is accounted for by social deprivation. Such a theory denies individual responsibility and the notion of free-will; this

is, of course, a prerequisite for people to make the initial choice to consent to have sex<sup>20</sup>.

There are further difficulties in addressing problems about sexual morality and the family. Firstly, as I have already mentioned, the formation of moral attitudes is a complex matter, and one that takes time to form. It is not clear how one could produce a change in such attitudes without introducing major changes in British society. Nor would it be possible to predict the unplanned consequences of such actions. A number of proposals involve the withdrawal of state financial support to never married mothers. While this may have an effect, it may also be necessary to extend state involvement in certain areas, where moral norms can be said to no longer exist eg compulsory relocation of certain people, requiring the unemployed to take part in state organised work ventures. Hence conservatives can find themselves pulled in opposing directions, demanding less state involvement in peoples' lives on some issues, and more involvement on others.

According to conservatives, traditional moral values have been challenged and in some cases replaced by what they term a *culture of relevance*. As Linacre states:

"the criterion imposed throughout our culture is contemporaneity. The fine arts and even religion, as well as education, are dismissed as worthless unless considered *relevant and accessible*."<sup>21</sup>

This idea of relevance is derived, like the idea of hyperactivism, from the demise of religious values and the growth in belief about the ability of man to improve as a moral being, reflected in his ability to build the ever better and safer state and society. It is an ethos concerned with the immediate condition. Conceptions of the past, and its relationship and relevance to the present, are rejected as unimportant. Those who do not accept the present situation are ridiculed by the media and academia



as reactionaries. The loss of the sense of historical also undermines ideas about the value and distinctiveness of British culture. This has helped to create and reinforce the concept of *multiculturalism*, whereby British culture is seen as of no more significance than any other. This phenomena has grown out of the ideas of neo-Marxism and liberalism. The Marxist wishes to question and politicise all spheres of social existence in an attempt to identify the power relations and "truth" behind the surface appearance of society. Liberal individualists seek to prioritise personal experience over collective, whilst denying the possibility or relevance of objective moral reasoning. One of the chief exponents of this process is the deconstructionist, who seeks to deconstruct understanding in the humanities by denying the appeal to a tradition of understanding, instead replacing it with a "reading" of the text exposing the power relationships found within the language used. This demand for relevance, and the attack on culture and history, appeals and is reinforced by the media. Issues become of burning importance, requiring a "sound bite" interpretation by the "expert", an immediate response by the government, before being discarded for the next "burning issue".

The culture of relevance is apparent in many areas of British life. One important area is in attitudes towards inequalities, especially those towards race and sex. For example, if the ratio of employment or crime figures do not reflect the appropriate ratio of race or sex in society, then it is deemed that there is a conspiracy going on, with structural defects being present, manifest in processes such as institutionalised racism or sexism. It is of no significance whether or not the structure contains racist procedures, or if any member of staff has operated in such a fashion. The role of God has been replaced by outside conspiratorial forces<sup>22</sup>. Thus there arises a demand to set up monitoring organisations, and requests for legal action



to address the imbalance.

The demand to redress inequalities is not limited to one's own country. Increasingly issues from all over the world are presented by the media. Again their presentation is such that a complex issue is produced in a summarised position by an expert, and structured so as to illicit the appropriate moral response and demand for action. Yet this process is distorting and can induce a feeling of helplessness upon people. Apart from having questionable moral pretensions - can we have moral duties to people that we are incapable of influencing? - it also diverts attention away from issues in our community that we have practical knowledge about, i.e. issues which we understand and can do something about. Hence it undermines ideas associated with civic virtue.

Another area of life that has suffered under the idea of relevance is that of education. Conservatives believe that there are two principal educational values: the pursuit of understanding and knowledge; the transmission of culture<sup>23</sup>. Both premises are attacked by those who believe in relevance in education. According to critics there is no such thing as objective knowledge. All knowledge is relative, dependent on the culture and society from which it was derived, and hence it reproduces the power relationships and economic values of that particular time and location. Secondly the idea of culture is questioned and politicised, as it too represents the particular interests of the dominant classes. Thus the idea of education is seen as one that is inherently political, with competition about what should appear on the syllabus.

When the idea of relevance gains the upper hand the courses available to students change rapidly. Traditional subjects are downgraded, so that educational achievement can no longer be represented as a mastery of a body of knowledge.

In addition politicised subjects enter the curriculum, for example Peace Studies, with both the questions and the facts presented chosen to support a particular political conclusion<sup>24</sup>. These subjects cannot be called academic as there is no agreed body of knowledge with which the student must become familiar, nor is it possible to subject the theories of the subject to independent refutation. Their success is measured by the level of political consciousness they can evoke in their students. Such subjects have made inroads into both school and university curriculums.

Within the humanities this process is furthered by the replacement of the critic by the deconstructionist. The task of the critic is to guide and explain within the tradition of the discipline. The deconstructionist refutes this position, which he perceives as reinforcing a particular social and economic system. Instead he wishes to replace such an understanding with his own meta-language of interpretation. It is a private language, and hence the truth of the statements cannot be judged; all descriptions can be presented as contributing to the total meaning. He seeks to produce a hidden meaning which the common reader cannot understand. Hence we are dependent on the deconstructionist for his insight and become alienated from our own culture<sup>25</sup>.

It is suggested by some that there has been a conspiracy to promote the above values in education and society. Scruton refutes this idea as too ambitious. Instead he claims that these values and doctrines get repeated because people depend on them for their employment. Hence to question them will evoke the wrath of colleagues who fear for their own financial well-being<sup>26</sup>.

Conservatives believe that something can be done to counter the cause of relevance, and return to a historical understanding of society and culture, based on traditional



education. Politically contentious subjects should be removed from the syllabus for all under 16's. Higher level courses should be allowed, but should not receive state funds if their courses are deemed to lack educational value<sup>27</sup>. Schools should also be taken out of state control and run on a local charitable status. This would encourage community involvement and commitment to educational standards by staff, pupils and parents. Quangos such as the Equal Opportunities Commission, and the Commission for Racial Equality should be disbanded<sup>28</sup>.

In the above discussion of relevance, and in the previous discussion over the family, it can be argued that British society has been subject to a large number of new ideas, which it has accepted with ease. At previous times in its history it would have been more reticent and dismissive. Anderson claims that society has lost the confidence to dismiss outlandish ideas *out of hand*, as well as losing the art of dismissal. There are two interrelated reasons for this. One is the growth in the liberal idea of debate. All ideas should be subject to debate. There are no beliefs or values beyond debate. The effect of this is that any sense of priority of values is lost; if everything is worthy of debate then the value of debate is lost. The second factor is that the criteria of validity of the idea or value in question is directed towards the consequences of the practices and actions. Whether an action should be prohibited is dependent on the harm it does to individuals, and the onus is on society to prove this<sup>29</sup>.

Anderson's point is that the more you debate issues then even more issues come onto the agenda, and hence even the most outlandish ideas are debated. As he states, "once the right to debate is conceded and the purpose of the debate accepted, the case is lost."<sup>30</sup> Such a method of reasoning allows, for example, the case for legalising necrophilia. Previous societies tacitly understood this point, and hence



certain values in society where not questioned or allowed to be debated. When ideas challenging these values were raised they were dismissed with ridicule, and this is the procedure contemporary society should adopt. Indeed large parts of humour are based on ridiculing ideas which challenge the moral norms underpinning society. Previous societies were not embarrassed to live by prejudice in its Burkean sense. Society understood itself as "a set of values and practices, not as an intellectual proposition continually liable to be called out by some new contending idea."<sup>31</sup>

The importance of this argument can be seen when Scruton's views on homosexuality were examined. His attempt to ground a view against homosexuality from a philosophical account of sexual desire proved difficult and allowed him to be challenged by the defender of such practices. For Anderson it is better just to state your opposition to homosexuality and to ridicule those who wish to defend and promote its moral worth. However, this approach of Anderson's is of use only if the machinations or forums for debate can be controlled; conservatives should not initiate debates on bedrock values. However, it does not necessarily provide an answer or method to counter values that are being publicly discussed. Scruton makes a similar point. He states that it is important for the conservative to take part in current debates, as these views need to be heard. It does not necessarily hasten the decline of traditional values in society as these may be under threat from other factors. Conservatives have been slow to react to this changing situation, and they should be prepared and willing to take part in debates about moral values<sup>32</sup>.

This problem with the thirst for debate in contemporary society is reinforced by the growth of the media, especially the broadcast media. As I discussed in Chapter Three, some commentators make use of Wright Mills thesis

about the problems of knowledge in mass societies. People who no longer live in small communities rely on media information about issues. The issues discussed become wider, and hence the viewer becomes more dependent on the "expert" presenter for information, arguments and conclusions. Hence there is a demand for experts who can fit the broadcasters schedule and compress their message into the appropriate sound bite. This media will be attractive to the dissatisfied\critic of society as they will have a means to present their arguments in a politicised form that is not subject to refutation.

This is a problem for conservatives, and one that Scruton acknowledges. He admits that conservatives have been slow in this country to produce media friendly experts and sound bite views, as opposed to America, where they have been much more successful. This is a major problem for conservatives for two reasons. Firstly, if people live displaced lives, commuting to jobs, living in cities, and not living an active community based life, then many of their moral attitudes will be influenced by what they view and hear. Watching television is a major part of people's lives, especially the young. If the values portrayed question and ridicule traditional values, then this must have some kind of effect on the structure and content of their own practical knowledge.

Secondly, if people are presented with issues that have little or no effect on their lives, but are presented as though they have a moral duty, then a feeling of helplessness and despair will develop. This can produce a reluctance to act at the local level, as it will be felt to be a worthless gesture. Hence I believe that the role of the media is an area which conservatives must look at much more critically.

Scruton also argues, in relation to education, that not all



decisions we take are political. For example the content of a school curriculum should be based around true educational values and not relevance. Such an approach assumes a homogenous society where there is a common culture and shared moral values; a bedrock from which our lives begin. The difficulty arises when there are people in society who do not endorse such values, and who wish to debate their worth. Such values then become political.

For Scruton this is not a major issue. He argues that there is still a large degree of homogeneity of values in society eg a general agreement to respect the rule of law. It is only in isolated areas where such values are challenged. Indeed, people are less interested in politics in general<sup>33</sup>. Yet if this is the case it would call into question the whole rationale of the conservative project i.e. the defence and rejuvenation of traditional morality, and the restatement of British cultural identity.

Scruton's discussion of myths in society is also of interest and could possibly bring him into conflict with some of his conservative allies. He is happy to use myths to reinforce values in society and to produce a spirit of national identity. This may bring him into conflict with the method of, for example, Flew, whose philosophical method is of a more rationalist empiricist nature. Flew acknowledges this point but believes that the task in hand is of such importance that theoretical differences could be buried. Scruton argues along a similar line<sup>34</sup>. However, whilst it does seem possible that there could be general agreement between such people, when the issues became complex and difficult, for example, laws governing abortion, it is likely that the theoretical differences would become publicly manifest. For example, it would be difficult to imagine a uniform agreement on the laws of consent for male homosexuals between Scruton, Flew, and Norman.



Throughout this thesis I have discussed the philosophical ideas underpinning many of the key values of authoritarian conservatives, as well as discussing the practical difficulties in turning these values into policy proposals. Authoritarian conservatives claim that there is a malaise in all areas of British society, social, cultural, political, aesthetic, intellectual, and that although the task is difficult they must do something to address it. A criticism often labelled at such commentators is that they are reactionaries, hankering for an (imaginary) past time that cannot be returned to. A related criticism is that the structural changes that have affected British society are too great; that there is a disrespect for authority and integrity, declining moral and religious values, with ever more demands being placed on the state. The question to be directed at conservatives is if governments are incapable of legislating the good society, that it is instead dependent on good men, then how does one make men better?

Scruton is willing to challenge both assertions. He claims that there is nothing wrong in him stating the problems in British society. As a philosopher he is not required to provide solutions. Nor is there anything wrong in wanting to return to a previous value system; if that system contains good values then why not return to it. He is also optimistic that the malaise can be addressed. Throughout history societies, and British society in particular, have rejuvenated themselves. New forms of religion have also become manifest. He admits that the tone and style of his work has changed from the late 1970's to the mid 1990's. In his early political writings he deliberately used a provocative style to highlight the problems he perceived to be prevalent in British society. This action he feels has been successful as many of the issues he discussed in a somewhat direct style in his early work are now being widely discussed in politics. Even the Labour Party has

abandoned its more sectional interest and socialist tenets in an attempt to become a national party. Hence he believes that there have been moves towards a return to the traditional moral values that he supports<sup>35</sup>.

Authoritarian conservatives are aware that by having publicly to articulate and defend their beliefs that there is a crisis, as these values should be the bedrock of society and not have to be articulated. Yet there is optimism that their values are the ones by which people live their everyday lives. By articulating them people will recognise them and once more order their lives by them. Scruton, when discussing sexual desire, summarises their belief:

"What we understand of our condition may also pass from us in the act of understanding. For we were never meant to have knowledge of this thing; we were meant only to be subject to its command. No phenomenon, perhaps, illustrates more profoundly the great poetical utterance of Hegel; that

*When philosophy paints its grey in grey, then has a shape of life grown old. By philosophy's grey in grey it cannot be rejuvenated but only understood. The owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the gathering of the dusk.*

On the other hand, it is a century and a half since Hegel wrote those words, and life goes on."<sup>36</sup>



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