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Roger Scruton: Forgiveness and Irony Study Guide

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ROGER SCRUTON: FORGIVENESS AND IRONY
STUDY GUIDE, 2009
Steven Alan Samson

http://www.city-journal.org/2009/19_1_the-west.html

Study Questions

1. To return to questions already dealt with by Kenneth Minogue in *Politics*, what makes sovereignty and law legitimate? Identify two ways in which consent is shown. What does Scruton mean by **citizenship**? How do political and religious communities differ? If the bonds of faith, brotherhood, and submission are missing "from a life based purely on consent and polite accommodation," the question is whether there is another option to renouncing freedom and this idea of citizenship. Is "this form of renewable loneliness" worth defending and, if so, how?

2. Why is citizenship not enough? What confession does Scruton make about his view of the ebbing of Christianity? What facts dashed his expectation of rediscovering meaning through culture? What does he mean by a **culture of repudiation**? If this is all Western civilization can offer, can it survive? But if the modern world cannot survive without citizenship, what must be done?

3. Identify two of our civilization's gifts to us. How does the spirit of **forgiveness** uphold citizenship while helping us find the path to social membership? Where does happiness come from? What virtue did **Søren Kierkegaard** believe Christ shared with Socrates? What makes **irony** a virtue? Scruton hints that both of these gifts have a "disarming" effect on mimetic rivalry. Why are both important for our democratic inheritance? Why does their role within the Western conception of law have so little in common with the Islamic ***sharia***? How does English common law fundamentally differ from sharia*?*

4. Why is it plausible to trace modern **terrorism** to the **Enlightenment** as well as to the attitude of ***ressentiment****?* In *The Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche defined *ressentiment* [a lingering hatred] as a "slave revolt in morality . . . of beings to whom the real reaction, that of the deed, is denied, who can only indulge in imaginary revenge." Helmut Schoeck's *Envy* discusses essentially the same phenomenon. Scruton considers nihilistic terrorism to be disconnected from any goal. As Marshall McLuhan might put it: "The medium is the message." [The causes terrorists espouse, as Lee Harris notes about al-Qaeda, are a type of make-believe or "fantasy ideology"]. What does **Michael Burleigh** conclude about modern terrorism? The utopian character of the cause adds to its appeal, making it a kind of Lockean *tabula rasa* [blank slate] upon which people can project their hearts' desires. The terrorists ask their followers just to believe: Long live the revolution! It is a (religious) hunger to live on an exalted plane, to keep the adrenaline flowing.

5. What does Scruton mean by saying that "Islamist terrorists are animated by . . . the same need to stand above their victims in a posture of transcendental exculpation?" What is their orientation to death? Can they be "bought off"? Although ordinary Muslims may be appalled at what is done in the name of their name, what two **important facts** restrain easy optimism that the Muslim community will correct the problem? What double standard seems to prevent Muslims from turning the anger on those who profess to be fellow Muslims? What makes this entire issue "an existential confrontation" for the West? What strategy is required of us? *Déraciné* means rootless or uprooted. What message do we need to send the terrorists and their supporters?

Review

citizenship culture of repudiation forgiveness

Søren Kierkegaard
Enlightenment
two important facts
irony
ressentiment
terrorism
Michael Burleigh