

***How to Be a (Capitalist without Ceasing to Be a) Conservative:  
The Rhetoric of Roger Scruton***

**By Joshua Mayo**

Every discourse proposes either barely to relate some fact, or to prove some proposition.  
In the first...the discourse is called a narrative one.

—Adam Smith, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*

The best hope, it seems to me, is the emergence of a new form of conservatism...

—Roger Scruton, “The Truth in Capitalism”

In the world of economic thought today, we recognize that market activity is guided not only by numbers but also by narratives: the tales we tell ourselves about how nations thrive. In his recent book *Narrative Economics: How Stories Go Viral and Drive Major Economic Events* (2019), Nobel-Prize winner Robert Shiller explains that stories serve as “major vectors of rapid change in culture”: engines of economic activity that prove persuasive in the market-place regardless of whether or not they are true.<sup>1</sup> John Tiemstra takes the narrative approach to economics even further, arguing that economic theory itself is built upon more fundamental notions of human origin, nature, and purpose—deeper doctrines we might properly name “stories or visions.” These narratives, Tiemstra admits, are often veiled in “several layers of higher mathematics,” but their implicit meaning nevertheless determines “formal theorizing” and “policy preferences” on both the Left and the Right.<sup>2</sup> In other words, on both the experiential level and the theoretical level, we see that rhetoric and human imagination play vital roles in what is often thought to be a strictly quantitative social science.

Stories shape our economic discourse both from within and without, but as political philosopher Sir Roger Scruton has recently argued, our current narratives on the political Left and the Right have significant problems. The Marxist rhetoric of economics, so popular now

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Shiller, *Narrative Economics*, xiii.

<sup>2</sup> John Tiemstra, *Stories Economists Tell: Studies in Christianity & Economics*, 3.

among American young people,<sup>3</sup> views capitalism as a story of class struggle: a dramatic clash between the oppressors and the oppressed which will only be resolved once the proletariat heroically seizes the means of production. This story, Scruton confesses, boasts an “immensely seductive” and “epic” quality, but for all its exciting narrative conflict, it proposes a tenuous conclusion. In most cases, socialists only provide vague intimations of a future order. “They take their inspiration from the thing that they are against,” Scruton observes, “not from the future that is supposed to replace it.” Sadly, our capitalist rhetoric is in not much better shape. Adam Smith believed that the “invisible hand” of free trade would sovereignly and benevolently guide economic flourishing, and many free-market thinkers today agree. But Smith’s world of physical commodities has been replaced by what many like Scruton call a “service economy”: the buying and selling of “advice, contacts, entertainment, travel, things for hire and rent.” Thus what goes under the name of “capitalism” today is something remarkably different from the system Smith describes in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776). “The old story,” Scruton concludes, “can no longer be told.”<sup>4</sup>

What do we do when the major narratives of both the Left and the Right fail us? For Scruton, the answer is simple: We tell a new (or is it rather an old?) story of economic well-being. If a coherent story is what we have lost, then a coherent story is what we must recover again, and such a story, I will argue, is what we find in Roger Scruton’s immensely helpful political primer *How to Be a Conservative* (2014). More than simply rehearsing the contents Scruton’s compelling chapter “The Truth in Capitalism,” though, the following aims to demonstrate Scruton’s effective use of narrative along the theoretical lines of classical thought.

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<sup>3</sup> For an in-depth look at this phenomenon, see Gretchen Brown’s “More Young People Are Embracing Socialism—Here’s What That Means,” *Rewire*, 23 September 2019, <https://www.rewire.org/our-future/socialism-young-people/>.

<sup>4</sup> Roger Scruton, “The Case for Capitalism Must Be Made Afresh,” *Reaction*, September 27, 2017, <https://reaction.life/case-capitalism-must-made-afresh/>.

Perhaps the reader already suspects from the occasional references to “rhetoric” sprinkled throughout this introduction that this essay is not an economic analysis. (As a teacher of rhetoric and English literature, I have no business wading into those waters.) Rather the purpose of this study is to use classical thinkers such as Aristotle and Quintilian to show why Scruton’s “reluctant capitalism” is so rhetorically effective. Whether or not the reader accepts the ideas of Scruton’s argument, I think we will benefit from understanding why recovering the art of *narratio* is essential for conservatives today. We will understand what makes an economic story work.

### ***The Role of Stories in Rhetoric: A Classical Approach***

Before turning to Scruton’s works, we have to understand why it makes sense to talk about stories, even economic stories, under the rubric of rhetoric. Some might wonder: Is there not a firm line between narrative speech and persuasive speech? What role do stories have in the art of rhetoric?

According to Aristotle, narratives have two possible functions in persuasion: They can *epitomize* something or they can *explain* something; i.e., they can summarize a point or substantiate a claim. In Book III of the *Rhetoric*, he explains that the outline of every complete argument divides into two simple parts: “You must state your case, and you must prove it.” Here Aristotle’s common sense is priceless:

You cannot either state your case and omit to prove it, or prove it without having first stated it; since any proof must be a proof of something, and the only use of a preliminary statement is the proof that follows it. Of these two parts the first part is called the Statement of the case, the second part the Argument.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1414<sup>a</sup>.

In the first part of the speech, the Statement will sometimes take the form of a “narration” or story: a brief summary covering “the actions themselves,” the matter discussed “of which the orator is in no sense author.”<sup>6</sup> For reasons that will be obvious to the reader, the art of *narratio* plays a crucial part in the total argument because it provides the premises or the inductive groundwork for the rest of the rhetor’s case. A legal witness’ story of what happened on the night of a given murder, for example, serves a critical role in the unfolding argument of cross-examination because that story will supply the framework through which the jury determines the defendant’s innocence or guilt. Narratives may also serve as inductive proof for the second part of Aristotle’s outline, the Argument itself, since they can provide fictional or non-fictional examples of a thing: “the mention of actual past facts” or “the invention of facts by the speaker.”<sup>7</sup> If a politician, for instance, wishes to demonstrate that her opponent has an unsavory character, she might cite a story or two from that person’s checkered career. Or she might (as Aesop did) develop a political fable that re-presents political vices. In either case, stories provide examples of things and thus serve as vehicles of proof or analogy. They evidence or illustrate the thing they aim to prove.

There is some disagreement between the Greek schools of rhetoric about what makes a narrative persuasive,<sup>8</sup> but lets frame our conversation according to the classic standards found in Book IV of the *Institutio Oratio*, where Quintilian maintains that a persuasive story must be (1) lucid, (2) brief, and (3) plausible. As we will see in what follows, “lucidity” means having the right words and the right details; “brevity” means starting well, focusing well, and weeding well; and “plausibility” means avoiding the unnatural and assigning reasonable motives. Let us apply

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<sup>6</sup> Aristotle, 1416<sup>b</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> Aristotle, 1393<sup>a</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> See Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, 4.2.31, where the author chronicles the disagreement between the Aristotelian perspective and the school of Isocrates.

these three criteria to *How to Be a Conservative* and discover what makes Scruton’s storytelling so effective.

### ***Narratio in How to Be a Conservative***

The role of narrative in Scruton’s chapter (“The Truth in Capitalism”) will be clearer if we outline his entire argument. In 11 short pages, Scruton surveys at least eight distinct ideas:

1. the evolving (and devolving) history of the term “capitalism”;
2. the “truth in capitalism” (i.e., the notion “that private ownership and free exchange are necessary features of any large-scale economy—any economy in which people depend for their survival and prosperity on the activities of strangers”);<sup>9</sup>
3. the Austrian school’s discovery of this truth during the famous “calculation debate” of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century;
4. the insight of Friedrich Hayek, who explains why both the price mechanism itself and the moral traditions which ought to govern it are examples of “spontaneous order,” not social-engineering;
5. the conservative *consensus*, which sees no necessary conflict between a free-market and a moral order;
6. the conservative *caution*, which acknowledges the possibility that the market and moral order will conflict;
7. the challenges of a modern economy which can only be addressed by what Benjamin Disraeli called the “feudal principle,” the idea that “the *right* of property is also a *duty*”;<sup>10</sup> and
8. the enduring call to recover a humane economy through individual action and conscience.

With each of these items, Scruton incorporates both economic history and philosophical interpretation (or, as Aristotle would have it, both “Statement” and “Argument”). *Narratio* is not a single, distinct phase of the chapter as it might be with some compositions (e.g., the “six-part

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<sup>9</sup> Scruton, *How to Be a Conservative*, 54.

<sup>10</sup> Scruton, 61.

oration”), but an essential element of every argumentative point. Likewise, the *Rhetoric* makes it clear that an effective writer or speaker will often oscillate between narrative and commentary because “continuous” narration of lengthy subjects is often “hard to keep in mind.”<sup>11</sup> What matters in this case is not the structure of the narrative, but the quality of the narrative where it appears: its lucidity, brevity, and plausibility.

Clear speech is important to Scruton—not only as a rhetorical matter, but also as a thing of political significance. Like George Orwell before him, he observes the way that faux-technical and jargon-ridden diction is often used to promote a “defense of the indefensible.”<sup>12</sup> In *Fools, Firebrands, and Frauds* (2015), Scruton describes the lingo of the Leftist intelligentsia as a “new and fortified language,” a dizzying and impenetrable vocabulary that attempts to articulate its own revolutionary aims through a shift in linguistic consciousness. This bizarre brand of *newspeak*, he argues, forms a lexical barricade, a fence of words refusing debate “except in terms that are barely intelligible to those who have not renounced their capacity to think about them.”<sup>13</sup> Scruton cites several examples of this Leftist diction (mainly from psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan and philosopher Gilles Deleuze), but one of the most memorable quotations is the following excerpt from the famous Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser:

Overdetermination designates the following essential quality of contradiction: the reflection in contradiction itself of its conditions of existence, that is, of its situation in the structure in dominance of the complex whole. This is not a univocal ‘situation.’ It is not just its situation ‘*in principle*’ (the one it occupies in the hierarchy of instances in relation to the determinant instance: in society, the economy) nor just its situation ‘*in fact*’ (whether, in the phrase under consideration, it is dominant or subordinate) but *the relation of this situation in fact to this situation in principle*, that is, the very relation which makes of this situation in fact a ‘*variation*’ of the—‘*invariant*’—*structure, in dominance, of the totality.*<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Aristotle, 1416<sup>b</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> This damning line comes from George Orwell, “Politics and the English Language,” 281. Orwell’s whole essay is one of the best short reflections on rhetoric and modern politics.

<sup>13</sup> Scruton, *Fools, Frauds and Firebrands*, 160.

<sup>14</sup> Qtd. in *Fools, Frauds and Firebrands*, 167-168.

In the above, we see what Scruton means when he says that revolutionary discourse aims to conceal even as it argues. Say nothing of Althusser's parenthetical mazes or his surreal use of italics: The passage above is awash with nominalizations—words like “overdetermination,” “reflection,” “contradiction,” “situation,” and “dominance”—a heap of fossilized verbs piling up like a boneyard of static abstractions. Whatever the author may be trying to say in this passage, the actual effect is one characterized by quasi-militaristic defensiveness. Like moving phalanx of raised shields, this steel-gray speech deflects counterargument (and comprehension).

By contrast, we notice the illuminating clarity of Scruton's prose, which like sunshine pours through the square, clean window of every paragraph. Take, as one shining example of narrative, the opening paragraph of the chapter:

The term ‘capitalism’ entered European languages through the writings of the French utopian philosopher, Saint-Simon. It was picked up by Marx to denote the institutionalized private ownership of the ‘means of production’. Marx contrasted capitalism with other economic ‘systems’—notably with slavery, feudalism and socialism—and predicted that, just as capitalism had overthrown feudalism in a violent revolution, so would capitalism be overthrown by socialism. In due course, socialism would ‘wither away’, to leave the ‘full communism’ that lies at the end of history. The theory is unbelievable, its predictions false, and its legacy appalling. Nevertheless, its terms changed the language of political debate in the nineteenth century, and we are now stuck with them. The word ‘capitalism’ is still used to describe any economy based on private property and free exchange. And the term ‘socialism’ is still used to denote the various attempts to limit, control or replace some aspect of capitalism, so understood. In all its appearances, therefore, capitalism, like socialism, is a matter of degree.<sup>15</sup>

Quintilian says that lucid stories use right words (i.e., language that is “appropriate, significant, and free from any taint of meanness, but not on the other hand farfetched or unusual”) and the right details (“a distinct account of facts, persons, times, places, and causes”).<sup>16</sup> In this brief history of the word “capitalism,” we see both. Of the nine sentences that make up this paragraph,

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<sup>15</sup> Scruton, *How to Be a Conservative*, 52-53.

<sup>16</sup> Quintilian, 4.2.36.

only one of them (sentence four) is rendered structurally complex by a dependent clause. Where compound structures are present, Scruton makes use of *parallelism* to group ideas under intelligible series or lists (e.g., “theory,” “predictions,” and “legacy” in sentence five). A few nominalizations crop up here and there, but unlike Althusser’s prose, these instances are familiar and few. They represent incidental items in a larger comprehensive narrative and not the sum and substance of an abstract topic. In all of this, Scruton manages to do what few writers can: (1) give a cogent timeline of “capitalism,” (2) identify the major players in that complicated history, and (3) explain why we use such a fraught word in the way that we use it today. He shows how our modern understanding of capitalism as a “system” is really more indebted to the enemies of capitalism than its proponents. From here, Scruton develops his key assertion that the free-market is not so much a *system* as a human *necessity* for larger societies.

Part of what makes passages like this one so remarkable is their almost encyclopedic compression. As mentioned above, one of Scruton’s major achievements in this chapter is his success in distilling 250 years of economic history into the space of 11 pages—roughly the length of an undergraduate research paper. Certainly, a lot has to be left out with this kind of lapidary style, but the amount of ground Scruton covers in those 11 pages is astonishing. One peerless example of this skill of concision comes in the middle of Scruton’s argument when, having laid the groundwork of a Hayekian view of “spontaneous order,” Scruton metonymically figures the whole problem of global capitalism with the story of the modern supermarket. The food economy’s “large scale centralization,” Scruton explains, comes at “enormous environmental and aesthetic costs,” which conservatives are only now beginning to comprehend:

A similar story can be told about most other chain stores in Europe and America. It can be told about the building materials industry, about the manufacturers of soft drinks and candies, about the makers and distributors of tools and hardware. In short, global capitalism is in some respects less an exercise in free market

economics, in which cost is assumed for the sake of benefit, than a kind of brigandage, in which costs are transferred to future generations for the sake of rewards here and now.<sup>17</sup>

Notice how Scruton insists on referring to global capitalism not as a mere economic phenomenon but as a “story”—a tale of sorts defined by the leitmotif of “brigandage” or robbery. By situating this story of global capitalism *in medias res*, by starting his economic narrative “in the middle of things” with one stark and familiar example of his claim, Scruton meets Quintilian’s first criterion of brevity, which demands that the rhetor begin at “the point of the case at which it begins to concern the judge” (i.e., the reader): not a theory, not an ideology, but our own compliance with centralized burglary. In a respectful, almost gentlemanly way, Scruton frames his comments in the hypothetical mood (“a similar story *can* be told,” he says), suspending his narrative in some liminal space between our acceptance and rejection of it. He couches his conclusion in the language of qualification (“in some respects” *x* is the case, he hedges). Yet what convicts the reader most is the representativeness and familiarity of Scruton’s example. By using the supermarket as a metonym for a much bigger problem, the author is able to “avoid irrelevance” (Quintilian’s second rule of brevity) and “cut out” everything unnecessary (Quintilian’s third).<sup>18</sup> Scruton starts right, stays on topic, and strips all excess out of the speech.

Anticipating the third stage of my analysis, the reader might be thinking, “Yes, I see from these examples that Scruton is a decent writer, but what makes this history of capitalism plausible? Why is it reasonable to believe him?” This is an altogether more difficult question to answer, and Quintilian recognized the difficulty in it too: “There are many things which are true,” he admits, “but scarcely credible, just as there are many things which are plausible though false. It will therefore require just as much exertion on our part to make the judge believe what

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<sup>17</sup> Scruton, 62.

<sup>18</sup> Quintilian, 4.2.40.

we say when it is true as it will when it is fictitious.”<sup>19</sup> In the end, Quintilian offered two criteria for plausible narratives: (1) we must avoid anything “contrary to nature” (i.e., untrue) and (2) we must assign “reasons and motives” to the principal actions of our story.<sup>20</sup> In fact, both of these items require us to look at the argument as a whole.

Scruton’s chapter unfolds a tight process of dialectical discernment. The author begins with a word we think we know (“capitalism” itself) and historicizes his way back to the real conviction of a non-ideological capitalist: chiefly, a belief in the necessity of a free-market for large societies. Contra Marx, “capitalism” is not a transitory social order, but a perennial reality, because the price mechanism emerges from the situational reality of supply and demand, and not the other way around. This, Scruton explains, was the Austrian School’s key insight. They understood better than their socialist sparring partners that “when production and distribution are fixed by a central authority [...] prices no longer provide an index either of scarcity of a resource or of the extend of others’ demand for it.”<sup>21</sup> Economists like Friedrich Hayek lead us to the inescapable conclusion that both moral order and market order arise from “socially necessary knowledge” which depends not on some rational structure imposed from without, but on the contingencies of time, place, and custom. Scruton confesses that “constraints on the market” are necessary, but he claims that these constraints come from the “spontaneous order” of civil tradition. Once the constraints of tradition and common law dissolve, there is very little that can be done to build them back up again, since all legislation “does not create a social order but presupposes it.”<sup>22</sup> There will be times, he admits, when the free economic order and the free moral order will conflict. (We are, in fact, living in such a time.) But we cannot address these

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<sup>19</sup> Quintilian, 4.2.34.

<sup>20</sup> Quintilian, 4.2.52.

<sup>21</sup> Scruton, 54.

<sup>22</sup> Scruton, 56.

issues with the inhumane mechanisms of social engineering: “The decision to fence the things that are not to be sold is ours, to be made by law when it is not made by agreement.” All this leads Scruton to conclude that, while we cannot avoid the challenges of freedom, we can ameliorate some of the bad effects of modernity:

We cannot now escape from the ‘commodification’ of life that prosperity has naturally brought us. But we can strive to discipline it through good taste, the love of beauty and the sense of decorum. Those good things don’t come to us through politics: certainly not through politics of a liberal or socialist kind. It is futile to look for a political remedy to evils that we can address only if we can take advantage of the social cohesion that depends in its turn upon markets [...] We should acknowledge that [nationalism and socialism’s] worst forms arise when their adherents look to them to provide the equivalent of religious faith—an absolute submission that will sweep away all doubt, demand total sacrifice and offer redemption in exchange. It is some such alternative to the realm of commodities that the latter-day Marxists are demanding. For what, after all, the remedy to fetishism, if it is not the ‘true religion’ that puts the unknowable transcendence in place of the perceivable idol?<sup>23</sup>

This sobering denouement to Scruton’s story invokes what some practitioners of rhetoric would call the common topic of *circumstance*, the discussion of what is impossible and possible. In our current predicament, what is impossible is “escape”; what is possible is “discipline”—an attention to “taste,” “beauty” and “decorum.” The power of Scruton’s narrative stems from its ability to change the way we think about the ongoing drama of economics. He renders the claims of capitalism plausible by recasting the dramatis personae, by assigning new characters and new motives to the popular story of economic struggle. In this chapter, we learn that the real battle for a flourishing society is not a Marxist struggle between classes, but a universal, moral struggle to maintain the order of a particular people and a particular social constitution—a tradition based on “socially necessary knowledge.” By stages of comparison, Scruton makes the Marxist narrative seem far less plausible. The socialist idea has yet to be justified by its legacy, but even personal and anecdotal experience confirms the need for Disraeli’s “feudal principle.” The reader does not

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<sup>23</sup> Scruton, 63.

need sociological reports to discern the ever-present, ever-pressing need for personal responsibility and duty to the common good.

### ***Does Effective Rhetoric Always Persuade?***

Admittedly, when we say that Scruton's narration of capitalism is effective, we are not saying that his economic arguments are universally admired. Such a distinction is crucial to this argument, especially in light of recent events surrounding Scruton's public career. In some cases, criticism of Scruton's conservatism has morphed into outright journalistic warfare. Just last spring, for instance, a public melee unfolded when then joint deputy editor for *The New Statesman* George Eaton spliced together a grossly mischaracterizing interview with Scruton, airlifting quotations out of context to create the semblance racism and homophobia. In the wake of this interview, Scruton was fired from an important government job, and it was not until summertime that he recovered his post and received a formal apology from Eaton. Eventually, *The New Statesman* published the full transcript of the interview, which included this exchange about capitalism:

GE: On the economy, there's always been a conservative critique of the free market, and it's increasingly said by not only some on the left but by some on the right that capitalism is no longer working for the majority and that free-market economics has proved to be inherently unconservative. Do you agree with that?

RS: Well, I've never been an ardent free-marketeer, although I am sceptical of state involvement in the economy, as I think most people are these days. Capitalism, it's a word, and what we have today is so different from what was originally described as by Marx and people like that. It's no longer the capitalist class of property-owners and property-less workers who are forced to sell their labour or anything like that. Most big firms now are collectively owned by their own members not as cooperatives, but as something like that, as shareholders. There is a big guy at the top, the founding person, but so many of them are not like that. These are kind of sovereign entities and they accumulate huge sums in profits, which do enable them to take actions which are not necessarily contributory [sic], don't necessarily contribute to the public good. So I don't know, I'm of the view that the free market is a necessary institution, it simply is what people do when they try to make ends meet. But that when things get too big and when they try to transcend tax boundaries and other boundaries which are necessary for the

control of human behaviour, then they have to be themselves cut down to size. I think that's where we need national sovereignty.<sup>24</sup>

Eaton's original 900-word distillation reduces the above to a couple fragments on nationalizing railroads and the big business antics of Amazon. All the fairmindedness of Scruton's conservatism, his discernment about the purpose of the free-market, seems conspicuously absent in Eaton's summary judgment: "Scruton has long prided himself on his contempt for utopian schemes to remake the world and society."<sup>25</sup>

With such episodes of backlash, one might begin to push back on our initial thesis. How much purchase can Scruton's "reluctant capitalism" really hold when the man's ideas are so forcefully reviled? Can Scruton really be a successful rhetorician when journalists like George Eaton go unpersuaded? But such criticism misunderstands the true essence of rhetoric, the real nature of the art, which Aristotle defines in Book I as "the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion." According to Aristotle, rhetoric is a "faculty"—not a psychological event in the collective, but a human skill found in the individual. The rhetor is the skilled communicator who observes options in argument and then chooses the best ones, identifying the "*available* means of persuasion" and not some ideal abstracted from actual circumstances. The real question is not whether Scruton's "Truth in Capitalism" persuades every reader, but whether or not he meets the "given case" of our present cultural moment. Aristotle believed that justice and truth have a "natural tendency to prevail over their opposites," but he also acknowledged that some audiences prove so hostile or unthinking that "even possession of the exactest knowledge" will not remove the difficulty of persuasion. Consequently, he places

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<sup>24</sup> "The Roger Scruton Interview: The Full Transcript," *The New Statesman*, 26 April 2019, <https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/uk/2019/04/roger-scruton-interview-full-transcript>.

<sup>25</sup> George Eaton, "Roger Scruton: 'Cameron's resignation was the death knell of the Conservative Party,'" *The New Statesman*, April 10, 2019, <https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/uk/2019/04/roger-scruton-meron-s-resignation-was-death-knell-conservative-party>.

the task of truth seeking in the hands of both the rhetor and the audience: “Its function is not simply to succeed in persuading but rather to discover the means of coming as near such success as the circumstances of each particular case allow.”<sup>26</sup> With such a definition of rhetoric, we see that Scruton—a thinker whose writing is marked by lucidity, brevity, and plausibility—can be an effective communicator even in the face of such opposition. In fact, the resistance that Scruton met at *The New Statesman* only underscored the moment of his public vindication: As Aristotle predicted, some measure of the true and the just prevailed.

### *Some Applications*

As I have tried to demonstrate here, Scruton’s work is rhetorically effective because it exemplifies those classical virtues of style universal to persuasive prose. *How to Be a Conservative* offers an eminently readable history of capitalism which elucidates complex economic thought without being overly theoretical on the one hand or muddying matters in the dirt and grime of contemporary political smear on the other. What is more, Scruton manages to do this in an easily digestible form full of epigrammatic statements. He surveys a long timeline of intellectual history, condenses it into a form that proves both illuminating to the specialist and accessible to the layperson, and provides a plausible economic narrative to both the Left and the Right: a *narratio* of capitalism that grapples with both the moral concerns of socialists and the theoretical insights of conservatives.

What are the takeaways from these observations? Here are two simple ones. The first thing Scruton’s rhetoric teaches us is that conservatives need a narrative of capitalism. In our current cultural climate, we cannot trust good ideas to shine forth as self-evident truths. Neither can we leave the power of arguments to sociological or econometric abstraction. If the case for a

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<sup>26</sup> Aristotle, 1355b.

free-market is to be made at all, it will best be made through a straightforward description of human society, and *How to Be a Conservative* is one example of how such a reality can be represented by cogent intellectual history. The second takeaway is an obvious follow up on the first: Scruton teaches us that this narrative must be common-sense—a history of economic thought which is credible, relatable, and clear. Marxist *prose* in Althusser and Deleuze may tend toward an opaque, technocratic style, but the popular Marxist *myth*—a story of working-class knights and robber baron beasts—remains (though fictitious) a simple and stirring story. Scruton shows us that a new era of conservatism needs to recover its own story: one in which the heroes and villains are not divided by class but by their relation to the common good and to natural rights. The real economic struggle we face today, Scruton insists, is not between the 99 and the 1%, nor is it between the democratic and republican parties. The real fight for economic prosperity lies between those who would conserve our common inheritance and those who would trade that birthright for a mess of pottage, either through the bureaucratic nightmare of social engineering or through social and moral decadence.

As Aristotle taught us, we must state our case, and we must prove it. Conservatives need to state their case in the form of a coherent narrative to remain consistent and principled capitalists. In *How to Be a Conservative*, Scruton shows us that we can be capitalists without giving up conservatism.

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