

Foreword

The nation state is under threat. It is being undermined by the spread of global corporations and supranational institutions, such as the EU and the WTO. It is also derided by many liberal intellectuals as a divisive anachronism. In this little book, Roger Scruton defends the nation state. He attacks the accretion of power by supranational organisations and explains why the liberal intellectuals who support this trend are wrong. Although he would normally be classified as a conservative thinker, Scruton's defence of the nation state cannot be readily located on the conventional political spectrum. His case is based on general democratic and cosmopolitan grounds that can appeal to both Left and Right.

Scruton begins his book with the following words:

Democracies owe their existence to national loyalties—the loyalties that are supposedly shared by government and opposition, by all political parties, and by the electorate as a whole. Wherever the experience of nationality is weak or non-existent, democracy has failed to take root. For without national loyalty, opposition is a threat to government, and political disagreements create no common ground (p. 1).

A viable democracy requires a community to which most people feel they belong and to which they owe their loyalty. They must feel part of a collective 'we'. They must be linked by ties of reciprocal obligation that ensure they help each other in time of need, that motivate them to participate in political life and respect the outcome of the democratic process when they lose. They must also feel that important decisions affecting the community are under their collective control. If these conditions are not satisfied, democracy will atrophy, respect for law will decay, and the society may even break up into warring factions. Scruton recognises that various types of polity could in theory satisfy these conditions. In the modern world, however, the nation state is the only serious candidate. Global or regional institutions and organisations, such as the UN, the EU, the WTO or multinational corporations are not alternatives to the nation state.

Indeed, the very existence of such entities pre-supposes a network of strong nation states to underpin them, to raise taxes, to provide armed forces to act on their behalf, to mobilise popular feeling behind them, and to ensure the rule of law. If nation states are seriously undermined, the result will not be global harmony, as liberal utopians believe, but global anarchy.

Scruton is not a narrow nationalist. Indeed, he rejects the label 'nationalist' altogether, because of its overtones of aggression and domination. Instead, he prefers the terms 'patriot' and 'national loyalty'. He loves his own country and he believes that the world would be a better place if people in other countries had similar feelings. He has no desire to exploit or dominate the rest of the world, and he defends the right of other countries to self-determination. This is clear from his attack on the World Trade Organisation for its treatment of developing countries and interference in what should be their internal affairs.

Although motivated in the first instance by concern for his own country, Scruton's defence of nations and nation states is based on universal principles. He quotes with approval the cosmopolitan philosopher, Immanuel Kant, as an opponent of supranational government on the grounds that 'laws progressively lose their impact as the government increases its range, and a soulless despotism, after crushing the germs of goodness, will finally lapse into anarchy'. Those enthusiasts who would like to see 'ever closer and deeper union' in Europe should bear these words in mind. Over the past 30 years the range of issues over which national governments have jurisdiction has been getting steadily narrower, and in many important areas virtually nothing of substance can now be decided at the national level. As this process continues, national democracy will become an empty shell and the peoples of Europe will be progressively disenfranchised. The result will be alienation and resentment. Moreover, where popular feelings are strong, individual countries will start to defy the rules of the Union. This has already happened in a spectacular fashion to the Growth and Stability Pact. The two countries responsible

for imposing this pact in the first place, France and Germany, have refused to abide by it and the pact has been abandoned. Whatever its intrinsic merits, this is a dramatic departure from the rule of law and it may well be a sign that Europe is beginning to lapse into the anarchy against which Kant warned. If France and Germany can defy the rules with impunity today, why not Britain or Poland tomorrow?

In defending European nation states against such follies as 'ever deeper and closer union', and the proposed EU Constitution, Roger Scruton is performing a service to the whole of Europe. This is an eloquent and convincing book. It will be of interest to democrats of all political hues.

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Editor's Introduction

Patriotism is back. Gordon Brown wants his party to move away from the 'old Left's embarrassed avoidance of an explicit patriotism', and champions a revival of British patriotism. Others say that, following devolution to Wales and Scotland, the focus of loyalty should be on England, but that important question is not the subject of this book. Instead, it makes the case for independent nations and the sense of national loyalty that underpins them.

Each nation will be attached to its own unique values. In our case, whether our loyalty is to England, the UK or both, patriotism is the bond of unity that protects freedom and democracy. In a free society we each agree to be protected by the same laws, with the intention of sheltering us sufficiently from aggressors to permit us all to give of our best. Democracy assumes perpetual disagreements, some strongly felt, but allows us to live in peace despite disharmony. It encourages compromise, consensus, and the advance of knowledge in the light of clashing opinions.

Why English patriotism came to be associated with reactionary opposition to progress is a mystery. It was always about love of a country that institutionalised progress by setting free the talent, energy and idealism of all its people. That is why this country gave birth to the industrial revolution, which brought vast improvements in the quality of life for all. And it is why we remain at the frontier of the scientific and technological advances of our own day.

This book, originally published as *The Need for Nations*, is now reissued as *England and the Need for Nations* to emphasise that legitimate patriotism is based on a homeland. As Scruton explains, English patriotism is not a threat to others in the way that German nationalism was because the latter was an ideology of dominance that knew no territorial bounds. Our patriotism is the ideal of people who choose to live in a well-defined locality called England. If others freely choose to live according to the same lights in their own land, good for them, but there is no desire to force our ways on anyone else.

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February 2006