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Scruton and Watkin – an unappreciated influence

The role of Peterhouse in the intellectual development of Roger Scruton's conservative thought is often underappreciated. This is perhaps mostly because the atmosphere of the college seems to be contradicting Roger Scruton's own personality and character. Furthermore, Scruton himself rather connects his own conservative turn with his experiences in 1968 in Paris. This paper claims that there is a parallel, organic development towards conservatism in his mental landscape, documented again by Scruton himself. This was defined by his acquaintance with David Watkin at the college. Obviously, the art historian had a major impact on Scruton's artistic thought. Yet the paper wants to show that Watkin's specific understanding of architecture itself is crucial for Scruton's own account of conservatism, as well as of the role of beauty and art in general in conservatism. The paper will explain why this is a crucial aspect, if we want to explain Scruton's thought. This explanation will lead to and elaborate his crucial claim that culture is upstream from politics.

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