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it is not immediately clear what the consequences would be, in particular for attempts to make literal statements (which is presumably what Small's book should be primarily read as consisting of). But a problem in any case remains where evidently metaphorical statements seem to defy literal interpretation. Sometimes Small himself uses metaphorical language, as when he says that '[i]n the hour, past and future are able to dwell together' or that the 'Nietzschean god [...] dances with an expressiveness that says all that in the end needs to be said about becoming' (16). This points to the difficulties facing any interpreter of a text such as *Zarathustra*: it cannot really be done justice either by attempting to distil its insights into theoretical philosophical claims or by responding to it in a metaphorical vein that leaves commentary and text equally mysterious. When these problems are combined with those of Nietzsche's texts dealing with natural science, it becomes clear how great the challenges are facing Small's presentation of his 'philosophy of becoming'. While Small seems to suggest that such a philosophy can be coherently presented, Nietzsche's attempts to deliver on his claims to be able to provide one appear to be more provisional and fragmentary than he allows. Small's analyses contain many insights that will interest Nietzsche scholars (such as the parallel he draws between 'The Vision and the Riddle' and a story by Mark Twain that Nietzsche knew), drawing on his intimate knowledge of Nietzsche's own reading. However, it is difficult to avoid the impression that, however searching its analyses of the texts it treats may be, a satisfyingly coherent and unified philosophy of becoming does not ultimately materialise.

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I Drink therefore I am A Philosopher's Guide to Wine

By Roger Scruton

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Of all the things we eat or drink, wine is without question the most complex. So it should not be surprising that philosophers have turned their attention to wine: complex phenomena can lend themselves to philosophical speculation. Wine is complex not just in the variety of tastes it presents – 'wine tastes of everything apart from grapes', I once heard an expert say – but in its meaning. Only the most woodenly literal-minded would deny that wine *has* a meaning:

in its history, its role in human social life, in religious and other ceremonies. Analytic philosophers do not spend as much time as they might in this kind of investigation of meaning or significance – what we might call a *phenomenology* or a *hermeneutic* investigation. Of course, there are more narrowly phenomenological questions which wine raises. How do winemakers manipulate the underlying biochemical material to create the kinds of taste which they intend their wine to have? Does the ‘terroir’ of a wine really make a difference to taste, and if so how? What is the basis of evaluative judgements about the quality of a wine? (Many of these questions are illuminatingly discussed in Barry C. Smith’s recent collection *Questions of Taste*, published by Signal Books in 2007). But these are not the only philosophical questions in this area: the hermeneutic questions have their place too, in an understanding of the phenomena.

Roger Scruton’s book is about the hermeneutics of wine rather than its psychology or phenomenology more narrowly conceived. It is an engaging, insightful, informative and (in parts) a very funny book. It is immensely readable, more in the anecdotal style of Scruton’s *England: an Elegy* (2000) or *On Hunting* (1998), than his more heavyweight philosophical works, such as *The Aesthetics of Music* (1997). Because it is so personal, and contains so much of Scruton’s distinctive wit and intellectual personality, it ought to be of interest not just to wine enthusiasts (whom Scruton likes to call ‘winos’) and philosophers.

The book is divided into two parts, labelled ‘I drink’ and ‘therefore I am’ respectively. The second part of the book is more strictly philosophical – Scruton starts it with the nice conceit that ‘therefore I am’ contain the whole of philosophy, each word standing in turn for reason (*therefore*), consciousness (*I*) and being (*am*). But wine and Scruton enthusiasts will probably get more out of the first part. The first chapter is a nice description of his own discovery of wine as a young man, but the best chapter in the book, in my view, is the second (‘A tour de France’). This is a very personal, but informative and interesting, guide to Scruton’s favourite French wine regions.

The appendix is a discussion of which wines to drink with which philosophers. The passing comments on philosophers show Scruton’s light touch and iconoclastic wit – ‘Nietzsche believed that you could undermine morality by giving a “genealogy of morals”; morality demands that we fight back with a genealogy of Nietzsche – and what a pitiable creature then emerges’. Commenting on Wittgenstein’s well-known remarks that he didn’t mind what he ate so long as it was the same every day, Scruton remarks: ‘it is hard to understand the remark, except as a rude way of saying “I am above all

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that”’. But the idea of which wine to drink with which philosophers doesn’t work as well as these comments suggest – the idea never really takes off.

To those who have never been captivated by the complexity of wine and the way it is bound up with western civilization, a book on the philosophy of wine might be dismissed as the typical product of conservative snobbery and elitism. But this would be a mistake. Scruton is not a snob about wine (nor, for that matter, about anything else). On the contrary, one of the strongest themes in his writing is his deep love of the everyday, of the simple pleasures of society as he imagined it once to be, where people were at one with the land and with the traditions of their culture. According to Scruton, this is something that (although it probably never existed) should be open to all, but which is being destroyed by the march of modernity. (In a nice aside, he asks: ‘Who am I to stand against the tide of history? Come to think of it, I am the only person I know who *does* stand against the tide of history’.)

The aim of the second part of the book is to make a case for the cultural uniqueness of wine. In one sense, Scruton is right: it is undeniable in many parts of western culture, wine has played a unique role in religious and social rituals, which no other drink has. But he pushes his point beyond plausibility when he attempts to argue that because of the qualities of wine itself – and what it is to drink it properly – nothing else could play this role.

The argument starts well, with a very illuminating discussion of the distinction between the various ways in which a substance can intoxicate. There are those that merely stimulate without altering the mind (like tobacco, for example). Then there are those which have mind-altering effects, but whose consumption itself brings no pleasure (e.g. heroin). The third category contains those things which alter your mind and bring pleasure in their consumption: cannabis and forms of alcohol other than wine are his examples. Wine, Scruton argues, is in a fourth category of its own: here the alteration of the mind is internally related to the experience of consuming it.

These distinctions are very useful, and the distinction between the third and the fourth category is subtle but certainly real. It relates to the question of what non-human animals can and cannot do. Scruton makes the nice observation that an animal cannot *savour* wine (or anything else). In being able to savour or relish the taste of wine, a person no more separates out the effect of the wine from its taste than they can separate the meaning of a piece of music from its sound. Although one would not realize this from reading the thousands of words that are written daily about wine, wine would not be the drink it is if it did not intoxicate.

The question is why it is only wine that belongs to the fourth category of stimulant. Scruton may be right that 'the symbolism of the drink, and its soul-transforming effect, reflects the underlying truth that it is only rational beings who can appreciate things like wine' – where *appreciating* involves savouring the particular combination of taste and alteration of consciousness which wine brings. But, as he is well aware, other stimulants can claim this kind of role in our lives. Scruton wants to claim that only wine genuinely occupies it. It's not obvious that this is true, and it's not obvious why he thinks he needs to say it in order to make the case for the greatness of wine.

Scruton makes a number of points in defence of his claim, some of which are related to our historical relationship with the vine. Wine derives from a crucial historical transition in our relation to the earth – when human beings settled, put down roots and stopped being mere hunter-gatherers. In a memorable phrase, Scruton claims that in this way wine celebrates 'the earth itself, as the willing accomplice in our bid to stay put.' But one could say similar things about distilled spirits and beer. Such drinks are not made in such an incredible variety as wine is, but Scruton's point is not about variety but about the intrinsic and relational qualities of the drink itself. In the end, one cannot help feeling that he is relying a little too much on the sheer panache of his writing to help his argument bounce along: 'Wine is not simply a shot of alcohol, or a mixed drink. It is a transformation of the grape. The transformation of the soul under its influence is merely the continuation of another transformation that began maybe fifty years earlier when the grape was first plucked from the vine.' Wine is a transformation of the grape, to be sure. And the mind or soul is transformed in its consumption. But these two transformations are so very different that it is hard to see what can literally be meant by the one being the continuation of the other.

In fact, Scruton's view is not just that wine is unique as a stimulant, but that it has to be drunk in a particular way in order for the harmony of taste and intoxication to take hold. It is not hard to agree with Scruton's argument that there are more or less civilized ways of drinking wine. And this part of his thesis is very plausible: 'The burden of my argument is ... that we can defend the drinking of wine, only if we see that it is part of a culture, and that this culture has a social outward-going, other-regarding meaning. The new uses of wine point towards excess and addiction: they are moving away from the old way of drinking, in which wine was *relished* and *savoured*, to the form of drinking typified by Marmeladov, who clutches his bottle in a condition of need.' But once again, the step

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in the argument that only the savouring and relishing of *wine* can play this cultural role is missing.

One should be sceptical, then, of Scruton's thesis that of all stimulants, wine is uniquely civilizing. Nothing has been said which removes the suspicion that it is purely contingent that the 'transformation of the grape' is the one that gave rise to the particular richness of ritual, meaning and social harmony which wine does. It is not inconceivable that the role played by wine in our culture could have been played by whisky or pulque. Scruton and the world's winos would not have had so much to enjoy in such a world; but again, his point is not that wine is more enjoyable to drink than whisky, but that it is unique in other ways.

It's hard to know how seriously we are supposed to take Scruton in some of his more extravagant comments: 'you could say that wine is probably as old as civilization; I prefer to say that it *is* civilization, and that the distinction between civilized and uncivilized countries is the distinction between the places where it is drunk and the places where it isn't.' His desire to outrage and court controversy rises to the surface, and can result in some of the funniest moments in the book. (Just one example of many: 'If truth were known, however, the best accompaniment to a bottle of fine old white Hermitage is a clay-baked hedgehog, and it is a pity that the law governing protected species compels us to use char-grilled squirrel instead'). But as with everything he writes, some of Scruton's claims must be taken with a pinch of salt (or more appropriately, with a glass of claret). Despite occasional gaps in the argument, this is a wonderful book for anyone who loves wine and wants to try identify what, in all its complex connections with so much of what is valuable in civilization, might be special about drinking it.

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