

**Scruton, Roger – Fools, Frauds and Firebrands***Bloomsbury, 2015 [Surrounding Knowledge] Grade ★★★★★*

This is a deconstruction of the ideas of most of the leading socialist thinkers during the last 70 years including for example Jean-Paul Sartre, Michael Foucault, Jürgen Habermas and Antonio Gramsci. The author Sir Roger Scruton, who is a Cambridge philosopher, describes the theories of the thinkers, dissects what they really mean and by this exposes emptiness and charlatanism as well as intellectual vanity and the pursuit of power.

My big take from this exposé of over 20 post-world war socialist-Marxist thinkers is that they are largely all the same. The socialist intellectual movement is a purely academic discipline advanced by well-situated university professors who criticize the society that supports them. They all share a conspiracy theory type of framework where a secret force governs a system and by this is able to exercise power over a mentally sedated people. The culprit thus extracts the spoils of power. The tranquilized and deceived people on the other hand miss out on living in the paradise-like utopia that would materialize if they weren't - unknowingly to themselves - ruled by this secret force. The academic is the only one who sees through the fog of domesticizing norms of power and must as part of a self-elected elite - a true philosopher king of Socrates' - lead the people's rebellion and by this liberate the enslaved noble savage of Rousseau so that he can live a life in spiritual harmony.

The secret force varies between thinkers. It can be the bourgeois, the western world/the US, the rational scientist, the corporation, capitalism, neo-liberalism, universal truths and rights, the consumer society, the society of the enlightenment and - later on - the man, the white man, the heterosexual (man) etc. etc. It is a rejection of the very society and context of the academic – making it an exercise in theatrical cultural self-loading (*“their revulsion is a kind of holiness”* as Scruton puts it). The arena of the coming revolution also conveniently varies with the academic discipline of the thinker and could be language/literature, the

historic narrative, philosophy, sociology, art, architecture etc. It is always very unclear what the utopia really looks like. The important thing is instead the struggle and the solidarity of the select elite who leads it. *“The contradictory nature of the socialist utopias is one explanation of the violence involved in the attempt to impose them: it takes infinite force to make people do what is impossible.”* All thinkers are obliged to add their contribution to the ever-growing terminology swamp of academic socialism to mask that they all say pretty much the same thing.

Thus, the structure of the framework is the same as the one initially constructed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels but the arena is now almost always cultural rather than a “materialistic”-economic one as in old-school Marxism - the exception perhaps being Gramsci, staging his revolution from below through the infiltration of all of society's most important institutions (with regards to their power to influence the mind of the masses). Obviously, the “worker” still has to be paid tribute by all thinkers and generally functions as a lazy type of alibi in their theories, but in reality he is immaterial to these culture wars of the learned class. The worker is simply there to be governed by someone. The existential struggle is by whom – the progressive learned intellectual or the fascist Other.

It is indeed interesting to learn the historic origins of many of the expressions and phenomena that one is exposed to when reading the culture pages of daily newspapers. The reader for example learns the history of critical theory (Max Horkheimer's *“systematic critique of capitalist culture”*), concepts like late-capitalism (Habermas' *spätkapitalismus*) and “the gaze” and why communist thinkers' texts seemingly confuse subject and object in the most peculiar way. The one large drawdown of the book is the language which is that of an elderly British philosophy professor. The book is no picnic to get through but it's totally worth it in the end.

Frightening but brutally vital knowledge.

Mats Larsson, October 8 2018