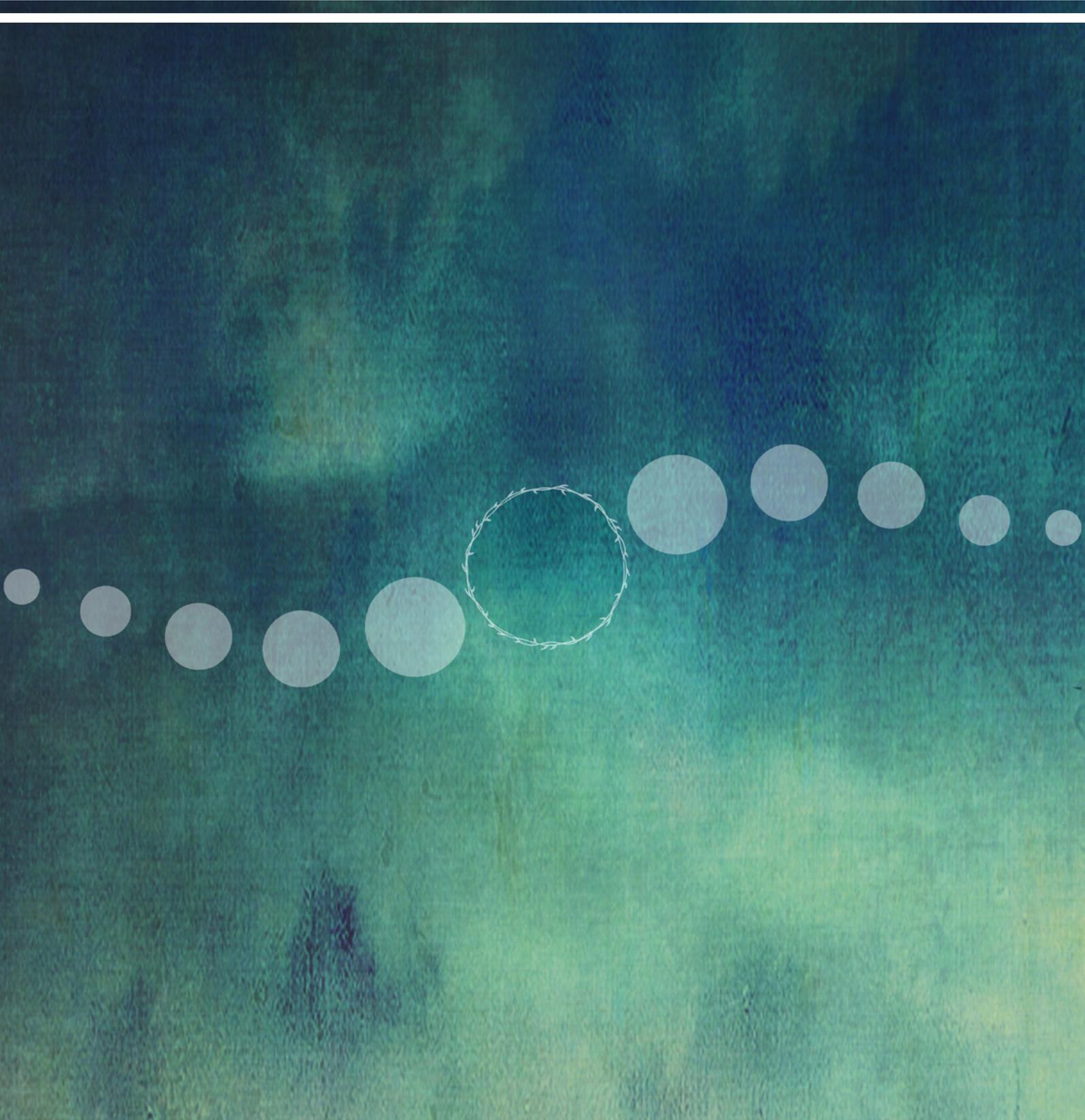


Settling Down and Marking Time

by Roger Scruton | February 2017





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Sustainable Prosperity, Social Justice and Democratic Choice: Socialist and Conservative Responses.

Can we create communities that are both prosperous and sustainable? And can we do this while retaining democratic procedures? These are huge questions and, like others who have addressed them, I am by no means confident that I have a persuasive answer. But an answer is more likely to be found, it seems to me, in the legacy of conservative thinking, than by adopting the standpoint of the top-down plan, which is the measure favoured, on the whole, by those who approach these questions from the left. Of course, socialist planning is no longer widely advocated, in its original form of the state-owned and centralised economy. But something of the planning mentality survives,

and it is important to consider this if the conservative approach is to be understood.

Thinkers on the left find it hard to separate the question of sustainability from that of social justice. Caring for resources and distributing them justly are, for them, items on the same agenda. They therefore tend to advocate the redistribution of rewards, and the kind of top-down organisation that redistribution requires. But there is no *a priori* reason to suppose that sustainability and social justice are compatible. The demands for them are quintessentially modern demands, born of the unprecedented prosperity that prevails in large areas of our planet. Maintained in security and comfort from cradle to grave we experience the dawning perception that resources are finite, that we all want a share of them and that they may soon run out. The environmentalist

outlook is a kind of shocked encounter with finitude, on the highway of infinite demand. And if it is to lead to clear policies it must begin by disaggregating its goals. It must recognize that prosperity is one thing, environmental equilibrium another, and that both are distinct from equitable distribution. Having analysed the goals, environmentalists must then explore the motives that would lead us to

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pursue them—and this immediately raises the question who we are. All political programmes are addressed to a first-person plural. Who is included in this ‘we’ and on what grounds?

Again I perceive a lacuna in many left-wing ways of conceiving the problem. The old socialist recourse when confronting a major political issue was to produce a plan, and then to advocate its implementation by the State, either through commands or incentives. We were then encouraged to proceed to the solution without asking ourselves whether the people will consent to it, or whether the government has the authority to take charge.

Something of that old approach has survived. Thus intensive lobbying by environmentalists led to governments all over Europe granting easy permission to wind farms, and even subsidies and tax breaks for those prepared to install them. And while the Dutch and the Danes put on a brave face and try to find ways of seeing these eerie spectres as additions to the landscape, the people of Britain, and of Scotland especially, fight with all the weapons to hand against their installation. Defeated, they turn away from the landscape—whose beauty had been the primary inspiration

of their desire to protect it. And they come to see environmental programmes as the product of single-issue pressure groups and incentives offered to the privileged, and also the principal enemy of what they most love in the place that is theirs.

On the other hand, we cannot assume that the solution to our environmental problems is simply to hand them over to the people, and put each matter to the vote. For people seek their immediate advantage, are keen to amplify their powers, and will raid the common stock of resources if not provided with a motive

to do otherwise. Indeed the impulse towards economic growth seems to be programmed into the democratic process, and growth is a *prima facie* threat to the environment.

It is true that a ‘steady-state’ economy has been advocated by various thinkers—e.g. J.S. Mill, and more recently Zac Goldsmith.¹ And others, like David Fleming, have gone further, advocating a ‘descent’ towards a ‘lean economy’, in which growth has slowed to zero, and market relations have been superseded by relations of trust.² Those suggestions are serious and seriously argued. But how are we to wind things down, while providing opportunities to the disaffected, the unemployed and the ambitious? How are we to counter the demands that naturally stem from knowledge, desire and envy? Give people the vote, it is tempting to think, and the ‘no growth’ politicians will never be elected. Or is there some countervailing motivation, which will lead people to deny what they immediately want for the sake of the long term interest of humanity?

The Structure of the Problem.

There is a single major cause of all anthropogenic environmental problems, which is

our habit of taking the benefit of our actions, while externalising the cost. If we try to pass the cost to others whom we know and with whom we are in relation, then, by a strategy of tit-for-tat, they will ensure that we don't get away with it. But if we can pass the cost to others who are not identifiable, or who will never be in direct relation with us, then the cost can be successfully avoided. In particular, if we can pass the cost to future people, it need play no part in our present calculations. And it is easy to see that democracy amplifies this habit, since democratic decisions are taken by the living, largely with a view to their own advantage, and without making any special provision for those without a vote, future people included.

For a community to be sustainable costs must be either internalised, or passed on *completely*—i.e., so as not to rebound. And resources must be either renewable or replaceable. In pre-modern conditions people have come close to sustainable prosperity by assembling together in cities, under a lord who maintained sovereignty over the surrounding land, ensuring that it produced the food required for the urban population. When such communities collapsed, it was not usually because resources had run out or the environment had become degraded, though Jared Diamond has some alleged instances to the contrary.⁵ By far the most common cause of collapse was invasion and siege.

Environmentalists often identify human beings as the greatest threat to sustainability; and they are right. However it is not the human propensity to consume resources that threatens the small-scale sustainable community, but the human propensity to seize those resources by violence. Troy, Athens, Carthage, Babylon and Rome are powerful instances of sustainable cities, all of them destroyed in the end by war

and predation. Their principal resource was human labour, which was renewed just so long as the city endured; and their concentration in a single place permitted un-trampled agriculture all around. Such cities were, by ancient standards, prosperous, and they achieved prosperity largely by trade, with a bit of theft thrown in when the occasion arose.

In that way the ancient city established a durable equilibrium, but it was permanently threatened with destruction from outside. The situation is no different today. We can establish sustainable prosperity only locally, and only if

we protect ourselves from invasion. A sustainable order surrounded by unsustainable disorders rapidly becomes unsustainable itself. We are beginning to see this in Europe, which may soon be unable to secure its prosperity

against the entropy encroaching from outside.

The point that needs to be emphasized in all environmental thinking is that human life is subject to emergencies, that the greatest emergencies are war and invasion, and that in such emergencies the environment will always be the victim. True, some emergencies are environmentally friendly—plagues for example. But we are thankful that we are no longer seriously at risk from such things. The emergencies of war and migration are, however, still with us, and defy us to confront them with a sustainable response.

The Meaning of Prosperity.

But what do we mean by prosperity? There are roughly two approaches to this, depending on whether we are talking about *homo economicus*, or about human beings. *Homo economicus* has insatiable needs, satisfies one desire only to fall prey to the next, and depends on unceasing economic growth in order to meet his constantly multiplying appetites. Human

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beings, by contrast, have both appetites and the brakes upon them. They can be educated to take those brakes seriously, and to reinforce them from the deeper impulses of their being. Members of a community can encourage and sustain each other through fasts; they can discipline themselves in the matter of holidays and festivals, and can shame their fellows into abstaining from all kinds of excess. They can be educated into accepting that a roof over their head in a peaceful neighbourhood with three meals a day is a big step towards prosperity, and that maybe they should not ask for a holiday in the Bahamas as

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well. It is surely one goal of the environmental movement to find the motives that lead to this kind of behaviour. And it is for this reason, I believe, that we should take seriously the conservative approach.

Its antagonists caricature conservatism as the pursuit of wealth above all other values. On this view conservatism is motivated by greed, seeks the privatisation of all resources, and rejoices in nothing so much as economic growth. Conservatism as I understand it has little or nothing to do with that caricature. It is motivated by the love of a community and its traditions, seeks to conserve resources, including the human capital that enables us to make creative use of them, and rejoices in nothing so much as peaceful settlement in a shared place, under the protection of law. Conservatives of my persuasion value wealth largely because that vision of prosperity cannot be realised without it. But prosperity itself is not to be defined in material terms: it is a condition of well-being, that stills the desire for more growth, more consumption, more distraction from our moments of serene and repeatable joy.

Top down or bottom up?

In the face of large-scale social choices we have a tendency to think in one of two ways. We can, like the French Revolutionaries, present a goal, with a plan for achieving it, and then set about to impose the plan by whatever means—often, as in this case, by coercion. Or we can allow people to negotiate their own space among neighbours and strangers, making small bargains, offering gifts and making threats, and with no overarching goal for society as a whole. In the latter case the result of the many choices emerges ‘by an invisible hand’, and not because

of a plan or a regimented strategy. The most important contribution of conservatism to political thinking since the Enlightenment is to have shown in many and detailed ways why it is the second of those approaches and not the first, that is rational. From Smith and Burke to Hayek and Oakeshott the point has been made that, except as a temporary measure and prompted by an emergency, the top-down regimentation of society in pursuit of comprehensive goals will always be counter-productive: the goals will lose definition, and the pursuit of them will not only generate an equal and opposite resistance, but will destroy the information that the plan requires—information about what people want.

Conservative thinkers have examined the ordinary motives of people in their free transactions, in order to argue that, in the right circumstances, the invisible hand will solve the collective problem, as markets (in the right circumstances) solve the problem of allocating resources in a society of strangers. But when are the circumstances right? In particular, what are the circumstances that promote the bottom-up solution of environmental problems? That is

the question I wish to address.

Philosophers and economists have isolated some of the ways in which, in a situation of social choice, individual preferences amalgamate to outcomes that are wanted by no one. These forms of ‘counter-finality’—the prisoners’ dilemma, the tragedy of the commons, Arrow’s theorem and so on—are familiar from the literature, and various positive solutions to them, drawing on the apparatus of game theory, have had an impact on political theory. The study has been extended into the domain of ‘common pool resources’ by Elinor Ostrom, in a striking book that backs up a far-reaching account of equilibrium solutions to multi-player games with finely observed empirical studies of successfully managed commons.⁴ The sharing of water among farmers in arid regions of Spain, for example, has been managed over centuries by locally constituted rules and courts established under local jurisdiction. Likewise the Alpine meadows of Switzerland are allocated by farmers under co-operative principles that promote both fair shares and the renewal of the resource. Ostrom’s discussion of these and other examples is invaluable in showing the ways in which self-interested people can manage ‘common pool’ re-sources to their mutual benefit, provided there is an identifiable community of those entitled, a means for resolving conflict, and a system of sanctions to punish the defectors. Ostrom’s case studies provide no argument for the top-down plan or the radicals who impose it. Like Adam Smith’s theory of the market, they show ways in which the rational self-interest of individual players sums to a positive outcome. But they cannot be easily extended to the wider environmental problems, caused by people who are strangers to each other, and who are unable to establish

local jurisdiction or a strategy of tit-for-tat. The problems of the open commons (oceans, atmosphere, toxic waste), and of bio-diversity and scarce resources, cannot be solved in Ostrom’s way.

Time, Space and Belonging.

The conservative tradition has something distinctive to say about this, however. Those who defend market solutions, and those like Ostrom who adapt them to forms of collective ownership, tend to assume no motive beyond rational self-interest, among individuals who occupy a space of opportunities, and who are choosing for themselves here and now. Their choices address their wants and the things that will satisfy them, and they jostle with others in a space that enters their calculations only because it is the scene of competition between the many who have an immediate stake in the outcome. Rational choosers in such circumstances experience time as a series of moments, and space as an array of situations.

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They need have no conception of *belonging* to either dimension—no conception that the where and when of their decisions is bound up with who they are.

I am touching here on difficult questions of metaphysics, and one thing that has always drawn me to the conservative position is that it does not shy away from this, that it recognizes that human beings exist in a way that is metaphysically distinct from the way in which other animals exist. We represent the world through concepts that have no place either in the science of economics or in the explanation

of the physical world.

Take the concept of time. Neither philosophy nor religion has ever been content with the idea of time as a sequence of moments or of history as just ‘one damned thing after another’. If we see time in that way then it seems to flee from us, to become empty and ungraspable. As Macbeth beautifully expresses it:

*Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
Unto the last syllable of recorded time;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death...*

To which the natural response is Macbeth’s: ‘Out, out, brief candle!’ In fact, when human beings ask themselves what they *really* want, as opposed to what currently appeals to them, they stand back from that idea of time as a series of moments and concentrate instead on *what lasts*. In seeking for sustainable prosperity we are seeing time in that other way, as the dimension in which we endure and give sense to our presence. The Greeks distinguished *chronos*, the ticking away of moments, from *kairos*, the critical opening, in which we confront lasting significances and our own ability to achieve them. The *kairos* is the moment when the arrow should be released from the bow, when the shuttle should be passed through the web, when the world stands in wait for the action that will leave a lasting mark on it.

Other cultures make a similar distinction, between time as a series of moments, and time as duration, between time in which things happen and time in which things abide, between how things are now and the ‘dream-time’ in which things slumber in their essences. We don’t have to be metaphysicians in order to recognize this distinction. It is sufficient to feel the threads of responsibility that bind

us to the before and after of our lives. As the environmental philosopher Hans Jonas has argued, to be fully in time, aware of my identity from past to future, I must live according to a regime of responsibility.⁵ I must recognize that I am answerable for what I have done, and that I am able to take charge of the future—to make promises, enter bargains, live in hope and also in contrition. The *kairos* for which we yearn and to which we gravitate is one that reaches beyond this moment, this person and this life. It is a time in which the dead and the unborn are also represented, through the monuments that bind them to us and us to them. Its mysterious oneness is captured in the opening lines of ‘Burnt Norton’:

*Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future,
And time future contained in time past...*

Seen in that way time lives in us as a place of untaken pathways, of decisions and commitments. (‘Footfalls echo in the memory / Down the passage which we did not take...’) We come to see that this present time is also past, but the past of someone else, who has yet to be. Experiencing the world thus we acquire a sense of stewardship: each moment can be rescued from its momentariness, and welded to the ongoing monument of our being here. For those who see time in that way all aims are qualified by the desire for what is lasting, and prosperity means nothing if it cannot be sustained.

Likewise with space. We do not see it merely as the dimension in which we live, competing for resources with others who happen to coincide with us. Space is also understood as the home into which we came and from which we will leave, a place shared with those to whom we are attached, and in that way part of our identity. Much of human life consists in taking charge of space, transforming it from a physical location to a permanent companion,

a land with a soul. In *Paradise Lost* Milton describes Adam and Eve in this way—not just as occupying Paradise, but as cultivating it, imprinting the mark of their love and belonging on the pasture given to them by God. That is what made the loss of Paradise so tragic—it was an existential loss, a loss of what they were, of the home that had made them and which they in their own way had made.

Home and Oikophilia.

In my book *Green Philosophy* I write at length on the love of home—*oikophilia*—and the transformation that it effects in our experience. I believe that this love is a fundamental aspect of rational consciousness, and that it is not captured by cost-benefit analysis, by the theory of preference orderings or by any of the normal ways of putting a mathematical shell around our hearts. It is an existential yearning, wrapped up with the metaphysics of space and time. This yearning erupts in poetry, religion, and family life; it is the foundation of our experience of the sacred, which is in turn fundamental to the creation and care of places as ‘given’ rather than ‘grabbed’. But it is not simply a cultural phenomenon. It lies deeper than reason, in the primary adaptations that make us what we are.⁶

The love of home is the imprint left by our primary attachment to the mother, and it remains in the background of our lives, the reminder that there is always something more important for us than the present desire. The work of John Bowlby on the psychology of attachment has established beyond reasonable doubt that human beings, in their natural state, are animated by the love of the *oikos*,

which means not only the home but the people contained in it, and the surrounding settlements that endow that home with its lastingness and its familiar smile.⁷ And Bowlby’s deep psychology can be extended to the attachments to community, nation and political order that we call upon, when we ask for the sacrifices without which nothing endures. The *oikos* is the place that is not just mine and yours but ours. It is the stage-set for the first-person plural of political life, as well as the image of a lasting safety. Proust’s great novel about time and its meaning is also a novel about home and its rediscovery. Throughout the long tradition of Western art and literature, from Hesiod and Theocritus to Jean Giono and Ingmar Bergman, poets, painters, film-makers and composers have traced over and over again the picture of the home from which we started, which remains in our affections, the measure and the goal of all that is lasting, and from which our subsequent homes spill out in those long trails of hope and regret, so impressively captured by Edgar Reiz in his cinematic trilogy *Heimat*.

All that I take as read. And it is in this feeling for home, which situates us in another time and another space from that of *homo economicus*, that the motive for environmental protection grows. Any meaningful search for sustainable prosperity, therefore, begins from the love of home. Home is the place where, if you make a mess, you clear it up, the place where you are conscious of those who share it, and of the lastingness of what they share. It is marked by those ceremonies and events in which time stands still and the presence of others, not the living only but also the dead and the unborn, is felt among us. Of course, in

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our consumer society it needs a little effort to stop the onward rush to gratification and allow these experiences to dawn on us. But we do it, and we can be encouraged to do it more fully, so as to amplify our attachments in ways that benefit us all.

The Unborn and the Dead.

Before saying a little about what that might mean in policy terms, it is worth looking back at Burke's reflections on the French Revolution, in which the conservative vision was first clearly articulated. Burke saw the French Revolution as instituting a new era in political life, in which society would be controlled from above by those whose self-declared 'virtue' entitled them to the full range of coercive powers. Society would be regimented in the pursuit of abstract and geometrical principles, the concrete meaning of which would forever elude the understanding of ordinary people. And it would all be justified philosophically, in terms of a 'social contract' to which every citizen was an unwitting signatory. The result, Burke rightly predicted, would be terror and genocide on an unprecedented scale.⁸

The whole thing, Burke argued, was based on a profound mistake about human communities. A flourishing society is not a deal between living people to seize what they find, still less a marching army bent on some vast and unrealizable purpose—though of course, in extreme conditions, human societies degenerate in those directions. A flourishing society is a fabric of historical loyalties and expectations, shaped by the free dealings of people over many generations. Its wisdom is not to be captured in a plan, but is the residue of countless agreements and accommodations,

which have imparted a form of reason that could never be contained in a single head. If you describe it as a contract, then it is not a contract between the living, but between the living, the unborn and the dead.

The reference to the dead was, of course, anathema to those who saw the Revolution as a release from all the old obligations and old ways of doing things. But Burke's point was simple. The dead, he argued, were the guardians of the unborn. By respecting what they have handed down to us we hold their legacy in trust. This is not to engage in some stultifying ancestor worship: it is to respect what has been set aside for our successors. France had been a country rich in endowments—

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schools, hospitals, libraries, orphanages, charities for the relief of poverty—which, because they were for the most part administered by the Church, were confiscated by the Revolutionaries, and their funds consumed in the on-going emergency. This sudden waste of accumulated savings was a

desecration of the dead; it was also a theft from the unborn. And the whole process, which led to massive inflation and a collapse of charitable and educational networks, illustrated the way in which by dishonouring the past the Revolutionaries spoiled the future. The Revolution, which pretended to usher in a new and glorious era of emancipation, was in fact a seizure of assets for the benefit of those living now (some of them, at least).

The respect for absent generations is reinforced by the special experiences of space and time that I referred to earlier. When I find myself *at home*, rather than merely in a place, when the moment becomes a *kairos*, pointing to what is lasting—in these experiences I am as though aware of others whom I shall

never know, to whom I am connected by unseen bonds of obligation that amplify the significance of being me, here, now. This feeling has inspired the art of Japan (the haiku and the Noh play in particular); but, however refined and allusive its expression in art, it is also an *everyday feeling*, one by which ordinary people are often overcome while washing up, stoking the fire or changing a nappy—a sudden recognition that others to whom I belong and who belong to me are present in my action. This that I am doing is not just me, here, now but us, at home, forever. It is from such a sentiment that sustainable prosperity grows.

Responsibility and the Little Platoons.

Burke had another and equally important argument to make about the French Revolution. Society, he believed, cannot be built from above but only from below, through face-to-face interaction. The attempt to regiment the people according to the abstract tenets of an ‘armed doctrine’ would simply destroy the knowledge and wisdom on which all durable social orders depend. It is in the family, in local clubs and societies, in school, church, team and university that people learn to interact as free beings, all taking responsibility for their actions and accounting to their neighbours. Top-down government breeds irresponsible individuals, and the confiscation of civil society by the state leads to a widespread refusal among the citizens to act for themselves. Moreover it is only in the ‘little platoons’ of civil society that real social knowledge—the knowledge necessary to live on good terms with strangers and to cooperate for the common good—is engendered. It can never be contained in a doctrine or a plan, but only in customs and traditions that embody the wisdom of many people and many generations. Social traditions contain the

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residues of trials and errors, and the inherited solutions to problems that we all encounter. They are adaptations, though adaptations of the community rather than of the individual. They exist because they enable a society to reproduce itself. Destroy them heedlessly and you remove the guarantee offered by one generation to the next.

The argument parallels those offered by the Austrian economists for the market as opposed to the planned economy, and by Oakeshott for ‘civil association’ as opposed to political ‘rationalism’. Environmentalists often identify the market economy as the real culprit when it comes to the squandering of resources and the triumph of the short-term view. Like David Fleming and Wendell Berry they emphasize the non-contractual side of human dealings: the relations of trust, gift and good will that thrive in local communities, just so long as a culture of belonging obtains there. This culture of belonging, they argue, is the real social capital, and it is vulnerable to dispersal and spoliation, just as soon as the market achieves its dominance, when all obligations—trust, piety and even love itself—are up for sale.⁹

The Use and Abuse of Markets.

In my view that argument, despite its core of truth, must be treated with caution. A truly free market, in which people assume the costs of their actions as well as the benefits, depends upon the social capital that Fleming and Berry wish to protect from predation. In particular it depends on trust between strangers.¹⁰ This trust rarely exists between the tribal communities of Africa and the Middle East, and it is one reason for the constant breakdown of order in those places. The market, on this view, is one part of the self-sustaining community, in which individual desires blend to socially acceptable

outcomes. The communist destruction of the market economy in Russia and Eastern Europe also led, it should be remembered, to the destruction of charities, churches, and institutions of trust—not because those things depend on market relations, but because they are, in the end, *the same kind of thing*, the spontaneous outgrowths of the cooperative spirit through which the problem of social being solves itself. Burke adhered to the free economy and traditional order for the same reason: that they are both based in the trust that people accord to their neighbours, when left to work things out for themselves.

Something similar could be said of Hayek's theory of 'catallaxy', which sees the market as simply one case of spontaneous order, in which rational solutions emerge by an invisible hand.¹¹ This does not mean that the market has to be, in Fleming's expression, 'taut', without the slack introduced by non-contractual obligations.¹² It means only that we should see it as one factor in a complex web of relations, a factor that cannot be removed without the tapestry falling apart, as it fell apart under communism. The real complaints against what is now known as neo-liberalism, it seems to me, are not complaints against the free market, but against the emancipation of the market from the constraints of small communities, territorial loyalty and the jurisdiction of the nation state.

Environmentally Friendly Property Rights.

Hence there is no reason to suppose that people animated in the way that Burke describes, would adopt the kind of property rights that appeal to libertarians. For thinkers like Murray Rothbard and Milton Friedman property rights have the function of ensuring that property ends up in the hands most able

to make good use of it, 'good use' being itself interpreted in economic terms. For this to be possible there must be maximum freedom of exchange and use, within the broad outlines of criminal justice. This has never been the view of the English law, in which land and buildings in particular are held 'in tenure' from the Crown, and subject to complex limitations reflecting the accumulation of interests in every corner of our long-occupied piece of the planet. The landed estates that were normal in Burke's day were, for the most part, held in trust by their temporary tenants, who could not sell them or radically destroy their character but were obliged to pass them on intact to their successors in title. That ecologically beneficial form of ownership was undone by the Settled Land Act 1825, under pressure from tenants anxious to exchange land encumbered by obligations for money that they could spend on themselves. Nevertheless, the principle remains, that property rights can be qualified by obligations to absent generations, and that freedom of use and exchange are not absolute in English law, but subject to constraints arising from the many interests in land other than those of the legal owner.

This idea of property is duly acknowledged by the history of trusts, and the over-spill of the trust concept into the workings of the law of land and inheritance. Even today to own a Grade 1 listed building is to own more costs than benefits: it is to be a trustee as much as a freeholder, and the beneficiaries of the trust are not only your own descendants but every member of the community. And if we are to ask why American cities are such aesthetic and environmental disasters, we don't have to look further for an answer than the unqualified freedom to transfer property and to use it as one wishes within the broad limits of zoning laws.

A Burkean would, in my view, wish to reinforce the principle of tenure from the Crown with a variety of trust-like clauses, including one forbidding ownership without citizenship—a provision that would have the consent of all actual members of the community, and which in current circumstances would be the first step to restoring London to the Londoners.

Disraeli wrote, in this connection, of ‘the feudal principle’—meaning that the right of property is also a duty to use it for the good of others with an interest in its use. The complaints against neo-liberalism are, as I see the matter, not really complaints against property rights, but against their emancipation from local and traditional constraints, and their accumulation in the hands of anonymous corporations that can transfer their liabilities across national borders and somehow lose them along the way. We have seen the steady ‘corporatisation’ of private property, and one contributory factor has been the regime of death duties, which makes it unlikely that substantial assets will remain, after the death of the current owner, in the hands of a mere human being. Since corporations never die they escape death duties, all other forms of private property being taxed to extinction with death after death. And corporations, because they do not die, do not respect the dead. They do not exist in time as we do, and their space is nowhere.

The trust concept is one way in which the Burkean idea of obligation has been realised in the English law. But every association, in Burke’s way of seeing things, is also a settlement, with assets that are communally owned. It is through free association that human beings acquire the sense of belonging. The creation of little platoons is what ‘settling down’ consists in, and it is this that opens

the door out of the narrow corridor of *homo economicus* into the world of real attachment, where time is *kairos* and space is home. In short, my argument has led us to a point where we can begin to think of motives, shared by ordinary people, which are not motives to consume, but motives to refrain.

Curbing Consumption.

We have abundant proof that these motives exist. Voluntary associations of citizens have, from the first days of the Industrial Revolution, taken the lead in protecting the environment from the effects of economic and technological growth, with the largest of them, the National Trust, founded in the 1890s, now grown to a membership of four million. If we are to address the question of reconciling prosperity with sustainability, it is to the platoons of volunteers that we should direct our attention.

They exhibit the motivation that we are looking for—the motivation of people who willingly accept to look after assets for future generations, rather than to exploit them for their present use.

Oikophilia, as I describe it in *Green Philosophy*, is not a desire to be weighed against its competitors, like the desires that motivate the world of easy consumption. And it is worth reflecting on this, since it will bear on the most important political question, which is not that of describing a sustainable form of prosperity, but that of identifying the incentives that would lead people to promote it. Oikophilia originates in our need for nurture and safety, but it spreads out across our surroundings in less self-serving ways. It tells us to love and not to use, to respect and not to exploit. It invites us to look on things in our ‘homescape’ as we look on persons, not as means only, but as ends in themselves. Hence its most important

»We can begin to think of motives, shared by ordinary people, which are not motives to consume, but motives to refrain.«

manifestations outside the immediate sphere of family affection are the love of beauty and respect for the sacred. Both of those states of mind involve the recognition of intrinsic, as opposed to instrumental values: and intrinsic values are the firmest brakes on appetite that we have. What is growth, as advocated by economists and politicians, but the pursuit of instrumental values—the constant amplification of consumption, production and the appetites that require them? Oikophilia involves a refusal to surrender objects to their use. It comprehends all the ways in which things around us are regarded as intrinsically meaningful and irreplaceable.

What this means in practice I have tried to spell out in *Green Philosophy*. It is not enough, of course, to refer to this motive as though its mere existence would bring the predations of *homo economicus* to an end. On the contrary, like all our deeper feelings, it requires a context, which will enable it to emerge, to flourish and to find the channels through which to express itself. Although we all have a capacity for love, and a deep-down knowledge that a life without love is futile, we all have to work to find that love, and to create the context in which it can flourish. Likewise with oikophilia. And this is where the political difficulties arise. As my discussion implies, oikophiles are in search of a home and it is to the beauty and heritage of this home that they devote their efforts of conservation. They are not globalists, happy to be anywhere on the planet, but localists, who look after the place that is theirs. It is this local focus that leads them to make the first and most necessary step towards sustainability, which is to make out a territory and an identity as *theirs*, to be protected from predation, and embellished and looked after for the benefit of their descendants.

New Problems.

This brings me to another and more intractable challenge to sustainability in the world today. We live in mobile societies—not just socially mobile, but geographically mobile, and in many cases with open borders. People in motion inevitably externalise their costs in terms of packaging

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and waste (look at a field just vacated by a pop festival). Likewise people look after a place if they are settled there, but not if they are passing through, or if they are struggling to put down roots for the first time (consider the ruination of the Wild West at the gold rush). Environmentalists tend to turn a blind eye to these matters, since they arouse the spectres of nationalism, xenophobia, border control and so on. But that is one reason why environmentalists do not persuade ordinary people, for whom these issues are of ever-increasing importance in a global economy. Yes, we will look after our environment, people concede: but only if it is *ours*, and if we can close it off from spoliation. (There is a certain assumption built into environmentalist thinking, that we are all settled middle-class people in a protected democracy, inheriting an infra-structure long since perfected and smoothed into the environment. We are not in Raqqa or Mumbai, nor are we in downtown Detroit or an illegal trailer park beside the Interstate.)

When we look back at the birth of the environmental movement in Britain, in the century of Cobbett, Ruskin and Morris, it is surely obvious that its comparative success was due to its being firmly based in a love of the country, and expressed through free association, outside the reach of the State. It was a movement of civil society, which was nevertheless deeply patriotic, and based on a historical and social inheritance that the

members were prepared to make sacrifices in order to preserve. Can we assume that a similar public spirit is available today? Undeniably, the cost of expressing such a public spirit has sensibly increased: environmentalists must take a stance towards mass migration and foreign ownership: to what extent, and how, can such things be controlled? If they are not prepared to confront those questions, then the appeal to oikophilia will be without effect, since the 'we', the first-person plural to which loyalty is owed, will dissolve into a global nothingness.¹⁵

The word 'we' raises the question of identity, and this question has become vivid and fraught in the wake of the Brexit vote and the election of Donald Trump. Thus the British people have made clear that they do not accept the continuing population transfers from Continental Europe to Britain. David Cameron's attempt to persuade them otherwise was framed entirely in economic terms: growth, growth and more growth. The impact on the environment was not mentioned. But surely, if you look at the issue objectively, in terms of what it means for a small and overcrowded island to absorb hundreds of thousands of new residents every year—what it means in terms of environmental degradation just as much as housing, health-care provision and the rest—you will recognize that this is not an issue from which environmental policy can stand aside.

The City, its Boundaries, and Our Home.

Migration to Britain does not come only from the European Union, of course, and the current refugee crisis has made it ever more difficult to frame a policy that will both safeguard social continuity and adapt in a humane way to the pressure from outside. New arrivals are in many cases unused to our habits of public guardianship; yet if they are to settle here then they must acquire a respect for this country as their home. And that raises

formidable questions of policy. How are we to manage, on the basis of our existing legislative inheritance, the vastly transformed country that will result, and how are we to encourage the sacrifices that will be necessary to adjust to the many potentially damaging forms of growth, including the growth in population?

I am raising questions to which there is no easy answer, and which indeed are difficult to discuss without provoking animosity. But there is a useful lesson to be taken from history. When in the early 20th century the towns began to spill into the countryside and ribbon development shut off the fields from view, there was a reaction from the oikophiles, who gathered together in their little platoons—the Town and Country Association, the Campaign for the Preservation (subsequently Protection) of Rural England, and so on—in order to lobby for the Green Belt policy subsequently adopted by successive post-war governments. This was a policy inspired by the sense of beauty and also by the love of a home that had been fought for as 'ours'. Although not framed in environmental terms the policy had enormous positive environmental results. Building in the countryside came to an end, and the residents of towns, instead of fleeing to the bungalow along the road, began to take an interest in the conservation of wildlife, the maintenance of footpaths and the restoration of boundaries, copses and rivers. This is surely one of the most important success stories in environmental politics—just compare England (Europe's most densely populated country apart from Malta) with Holland (the next most densely populated), and compare too the wildlife count in both places, the extent of noise pollution, light pollution, urban sprawl and traffic on the lanes.

That policy was possible, however, because the towns were habitable places, and homes to their residents, war damage notwithstanding. This was as true of the Victorian industrial

cities described by Arnold Bennett as of the rural market towns of Thomas Hardy.¹⁴ As in the ancient world, sustainable prosperity today must be located in such towns and cities, where populations are concentrated and labour is the principal resource. The greatest environmental disaster of the post-war period was not the pesticide lamented by Rachel Carson, nor the government-subsidised uprooting of hedgerows and copses—horrible though those were. Far worse was the invasion of our cities by the architectural modernists, and the planners whose job they made so simple. A style of building was adopted and indeed imposed by town councils, which was avowedly ‘international’, with no attachment to place and no feeling for history: an architecture of nowhere and the moment. This architecture involved the clearance of streets, the uprooting of populations and the destruction of neighbourhoods. Whole areas of our major cities were devastated, their old communities driven out, to make way for incomers conscious of coming to nowhere, as in Tower Hamlets today. The social problems that are emerging are also environmental problems, as the fleeing populations migrate to the countryside, and the sense of home is lost to the residents who remain.

We can encourage people to trade the material wealth coveted by *homo economicus* for real prosperity (i.e. community and sufficiency) only if they are settled in places that speak to them of home and inheritance. Many of our cities no longer do this, not because people want to live as nomads and never settle down, but because the urban surroundings are merely spaces, marked out by the piled-up horizontals of the tower block. The first step towards reviving oikophilia must

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be made here, in the city centre. The point has been eloquently argued by Nicholas Boys Smith of Create Streets, who has shown that streets can reach higher population densities than all save the most monstrous of the high-rise estates.¹⁵ His formula for reviving our city centres, and re-creating them as settlements, is, to my mind, the most positive piece of environmental thinking that has occurred in recent years. This would be the first step to mimicking those self-contained cities of the ancient world, which were the best examples of sustainable prosperity that we have.

Nor is this argument simply an argument about the urban environment of Britain. Although the refugee crisis has its origins in civil wars of a political and religious nature, urban squalor and dehumanised architecture have had a vital part to play in both exacerbating the conflicts and discouraging people from rebuilding in the wake of them. This has been brought home vividly by the architect

Marwa al-Sabouni in her book about the Syrian conflict, and it is as true of the Middle East as it is of Britain, that people can be at peace with each other and committed to protecting

their shared environment only when they see their surroundings as a home.¹⁶ The destruction of the Middle East may have begun with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire; but it was vastly accelerated by Le Corbusier’s plan for Algiers, which set the whole region in motion, with a rhythm that was alien to its soul.

Modest Conclusions.

The conception of human motivation that I have advocated in this essay needs filling out, and this I have tried to do in the two central chapters of *Green Philosophy*: ‘Heimat and

Habitat’, and ‘Beauty, Piety and Desecration’. It is not a conception that translates instantly into policy, though it is assumed by many of the initiatives that appeal to public spirited people—notably the movement for ‘transition towns’, in which local communities insulate themselves from the more destructive habits of our times, while

striving to retain their prosperity through relations of mutual support. Those who advocate transi-

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tion towns are right to hope for communities committed to another way of life, with minimum waste, responsible sourcing, efficient recycling and the adoption of clean sources of energy. But they naturally encounter the criticism that it does no good to create a small community organised on sustainable principles when everywhere else is lapsing into entropy.

My response is to say that you have to begin somewhere, and the only cogent way to proceed is to build upon motives that ordinary people already have, and which can put a brake on the habit of externalizing costs. Moreover small can get bigger, if the trust that it engenders can spread. That is why, for me, the Burkean approach to social problems, through free association and the little platoon, needs to be incorporated into a national movement, like the National Trust, in which patriotic sentiment and the respect for sovereignty are wound in to the environmental agenda. For nations can set an example, and also put pressure on other nations to follow suit.

Supposing that we can, in that way, rescue the human habitat, and instil its residents with the long-term perspective that Burke described, so as to exist in another time and another space than the time and space where the games of *homo economicus* are played. How exactly these people live, if the result is to be

truly sustainable? It seems to me that people animated by oikophilia know instinctively what to do and what to encourage, just as we all know instinctively how to protect and look after the home. But for good measure I conclude here with the paragraphs with which I concluded *Green Philosophy*:

‘The solution... is to care for one’s home, meanwhile living not frugally but temperately, not stingily but with a prudent generosity, so as to embellish and renew the plot of earth, and the community,

to which one is attached. Of course it matters what we eat ... Hence we should not shop in the supermarket; we should eat meat only from animals that have been cared for or hunted in sustainable ways; we should avoid packaged products and seek out local food. And maybe we should take our holidays at home, or at any rate in some familiar and constantly revisited place that we can reach without burning up the planet. We should not keep environmentally destructive and carnivorous pets like cats and dogs. And we should live in families, sharing resources, not in order to make use of each other’s body heat (though that too is good) but in order to generate the spiritual resource on which the earth depends, which is home and our attachment to it.

‘Those precepts are predicated upon wealth and freedom that we could renounce only at a cost that most of us are not willing to pay. They are small adjustments—good for the soul, and reinforcing the best of our motives... The difficult part is that of putting oikophilia into practice. For it means combining with others in order to live the civic life; it means resisting entropy, whether it comes from below in the form of social nihilism, or from above in the form of oikophobic edicts; it means creating and sustaining neighbourhoods. It means actively handing on to the next generation all that

we have by way of knowledge and competence, and imbuing our successors with a spirit of stewardship that we also, in our own actions, display. This is hard work, requiring patience and sacrifice. But “better a dish of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred withal”.’

Notes

1 J.S. Mill, *Principles of Political Economy*, London 1848, Book 4, chapter 6, ‘Of the Stationary State’; Zac Goldsmith, *The Constant Economy: How to Create a Stable Society*, London, Atlantic Books, 2009.

2 David Fleming, *Lean Logic*, edited as *Surviving the Future* by Shaun Chamberlin,

3 Jared Diamond, *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Survive*, London, Allen Lane, 2005.

4 Elinor Ostrom, *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action*, Cambridge 1990.

5 Hans Jonas, *The Imperative of Responsibility*, University of Chicago Press, 1984.

6 On some of the religious input here, see Michael S. Northcott, *Place, Ecology and the Sacred*, London, Bloomsbury 2016.

7 John Bowlby, *Attachment*, 2nd ed., New York, Basic Books, 1999; *Separation*, New York, Basic Books, 2000; *Loss*, London, Pimlico, 1998.

8 Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France* was published in November 1790, before the terror, before the execution of the king, and before the revolutionary tribunals, all of which he predicted.

9 David Fleming, *Surviving the Future*, op. cit.; Wendell Berry, *The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture*, New York, Sierra Club, 1977.

10 See the argument of Francis Fukuyama, in *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity*, New York, Free Press, 1992.

11 F.A. Hayek, *Law, Legislation and Liberty*, two vols.

12 *Surviving the Future*, op. cit. pp. 15-18.

13 The economist Albert Hirschmann has compared loyalty to a ‘protective tariff’: the boundary erected in order to sustain free dealings among those who recognize a prior commitment to each other’s well-being. *Exit, Voice and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations and States*, Cambridge Mass, Harvard University Press, 1970, p. 79.

14 Why it was true is a question that I address in *Green Philosophy*, Chapter 10.

15 See the web-site of *Create Streets*.

16 Marwa al-Sabouni, *The Battle for Home*, Thames and Hudson 2016.

About the Author



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