Green Philosophy Day

Sunday 6 September 2020

Notes on the Discussion

‘Green Philosophy’ introduced by Ian Christie

The first session was led by Ian Christie from the Centre for Environment and Sustainability at the University of Surrey.

Ian recalled Roger’s 60th birthday when he found himself in the same room as Sir Norman Lamont (former Conservative Chancellor of the Exchequer), Dame Clare Fox (former revolutionary Marxist and founder of the Academy of Ideas) and “people to the left of me!”. One badge of honour for Ian is the being a founding member of ‘Lefties for Scruton’ a loose alliance of mates always prepared to jump into the fray when Roger got in trouble with T*he Guardian*. This anecdote was to point out that Roger was someone who was happy to look for a compromise and his work on questions concerning the environment or animal rights is an example of him involving himself in debates that cross political divides.

From Green Philosophy, the concept of Oikophilia – the love of a place, of a home, is RS’s important contribution. Solutions to environmental problems are more likely to come from people who are motivated by attachment and who want to pass on what they have enjoyed.

Ian mentioned people who had raised the question of ecological sustainability in public debate such as Pope Benedict XVI.

*‘The emergence of the ecological movement...was and continues to be a cry for fresh air which must not be ignored...the Earth has a dignity of its own and...we must*

*follow its directives...The importance of ecology is no longer disputed. We must listen*

*to the language of nature and answer accordingly’.* Pope Benedict XVI, 2011

He referenced the scientific research which charts the acceleration of climate change and species decline since the 1950s caused by the rapid expansion of coal and gas fuelled businesses. If the decline is plotted as a curve, it is a steep curve, the urgent question is how to level it out? (See the work of Business for Nature and Future Earth and The Stockholm Resiliance Council (Slides 8-9)). One important question is ‘Can we all live well in a world under so much pressure’?

Ian Christie argued that the best chance of achieving change is with a philosophical more than a scientific approach. The science may give us the detail, but the solutions will come from the debate over how we are going to solve problems. We must decide what we are going by debate and consenus forming.

Reference to other writers including: Patrick Curry – *Humans and Nature*

Alastair MacIntyre and Elinor Ostrom and Bishop Hugh Montefiore.

‘*care for a future world matters to our well being now’* Samuel Scheffler.

Ian sees these writers as other’s who in their own way are also considering oikophilia, he also suggested that there is a parallel with Heideggar’s concept of ‘heimat’.

Oikophilia as a love of place, has a natural piety, it is a place to associate with others, it is a call to take responsibility.

‘Litterary Oikophilia’ by George Monck

Led by George Monck the founder and CEO of ‘Clean up UK’. Thoughts on litter and the clearing of litter:

* A disfigured environment is similar to a personal disfigurement, it causes distress and it can even be a cause of crime.
* The government, through local government spends £682 million on dealing with litter.
* Litter accumulates from the actions of many groups, even people who would say they don’t drop litter, but yet, in the absence of a bin, they might carefully place, and walk away from, their finished coffee cup.
* Clearing litter creates a social bond and fosters pride in place. Clean up UK has many successful groups in inner cities where the social side has been welcome.
* Litter clearing teams must be offered Cake!

‘A Green Countryside’ by Tim Bonner

Tim Bonner, CEO of the Countryside Alliance, talking to a theme of ‘A Green Countryside’ regards the countryside and farmers as central in the current debate.

Finding a ‘start date’ for explaining where we are took Bonner, as it had Christie, to the rapid industrialisation of the 1950s and the changes in farming practice that were a consequence. In those days a roast chicken was a luxury.

Intensification in agriculture (such as the Common Agricultural Policy headage payment) arose from the war years when the threat of defeat due to starvation was a driver to a food policy to feed the nation. The Archers was started to promote the increase in production and motivate farmers.

TB talked of the deep cultural bond of a farmer to his land and his need to farm economically and his desire to pass on the farm to his family. Policy and debate that does not take this into account is insulting and upsetting to farmers.

The 1960s, with the publication of ‘Silent Spring’ saw the beginning of the debate as to how to farm ‘with nature’. A leader in the area is Robin Page and his Countryside Restoration Trust. Page seeks to provide for nature while retaining the principle that people manage the land and that community is important.

A new radical view led by George Monbiot in the UK is that ‘man is the problem’ and that the countryside should be returned to nature. The movement ‘Rewilding Britain’ has suggested that a mountainous region of west wales should be rewilded. This is an insult to a community who is attached to the land and ready to manage it.

Bonner pointed out that ‘Rewilding’ is rather more catchy than ‘Oikophilia’ and that a green countryside will require working with those willing to manage the land and make it economically viable. He pointed out that the Knepp Estate (as described in ‘*Wilding*’ by Isabella Tree) depends on a 25 year subsidy package as well as the associated food and tourism business.

Another writer Tim Bonner led us to is James Rebanks, author of *English Pastoral* (2020). See also: How to save British farming (and the countryside) <https://unherd.com/2020/09/how-to-save-british-farming-and-the-countryside/>

# Lunch was eaten in the orchard and consisted of good food, good conversation and plenty of rosé. Many of the audience are local with an affiliation to Garsdon Church and others, from a little further away, had heard about the event from a promotion of it by the new magazine [*The Critic*](https://thecritic.co.uk/)*.*

Panel led by Frances Ward in discussion with Lucy Scruton, Gemma Jolliffe and Saurav Tamang on the subject of:

‘*Like There's No Tomorrow: Climate Crisis, Eco-Anxiety and God’*.

Book can be obtained from [here](https://www.sacristy.co.uk/books/theology/climate-crisis).

# The book considers the climate crisis alongside the description of a narrowboat journey through the English canal network. Ward’s eco-anxiety stems from a sense of loss and a lament for England that is passing. The book contains poetry (some her own), psalms and quotations that help her express that sense of loss including a quotation from RS’s *Gentle Regrets*. The sense of loss is not just concerned with ecological loss or the losses looming caused by climate change, but also imagining the loss for some people who do not, as she does, look for God’s grace and God’s presence in the natural world. For Ward, it is moments of grace and love that motivates her desire to ensure there is a ‘tomorrow’.

# On the subject of eco-anxiety other panellists were asked for their views.

# Saurav Tamang said that he feels anxiety is high as it concerns an unknown future. We are expecting leaders to make decisions on what might happen, not something we know from past experience. He referred to a Ted talk by Britt Wray: [How climate change affects your mental health](https://www.ted.com/talks/britt_wray_how_climate_change_affects_your_mental_health?language=en).

# Gemma Joliffe said that much of her Geography course considers the nature of societies. She suggested that people’s anxiety comes from a sense of powerlessness. Many people make changes in their consumption habits to try to address the environmental problems, but can the individual really make any difference?

# Lucy Scruton explained an idea introduced by Frances Ward that she terms ‘hyper individualism’ which is consumers trying to change the world by their choices. However this might be an easy opt out, by corporations, who take little responsibility themselves, except to suggest that consumers have the power to create change through their purchases.

# An audience member asked the panellists their view on Greta Thunberg’s work.

# Lucy Scruton said that Thunberg had done a great deal to express what young people value and it is good that she has got through to so many people. Young people do not want things they value lost to climate change. Gemma Joliffe said she was right to give a sense of urgency to environmental questions and Saurav Tamang said that we should not expect her to deliver the answers, but that she has achieved a lot by getting people to consider the problems.

# As to solutions, the panellists were pragmatic and felt that solutions to environmental problems had to be balance with human need for jobs and security. Saurav pointed out that although the reduction in air travel was good for the environment, the cost to people working in the industry was also extreme. As God said, ‘Love your neigbour’!

# This brought us back to themes considered under the banner of oikophilia – love of place and people that make the place.

# In response to an idea put forward in Ward’s book and referenced by Gemma and Lucy concerning the role of the individual and the role of larger organisations panellists who had contributed throughout the day drew our attention to the following initiatives.

# George Monck said that from 2023 legislation would make corporations responsible for the waste packaging they use for their products (Extended Producer agreements).

# Tim Bonner said that ‘Certified Fisheries’ is an area of positive work.

# Frances Ward said the church had supported companies to audit their ecological impact.

# Ian Christie drew attention to Business for Nature. He said some companies are encouraging ‘congregational’ action e.g. ‘Live Lagom’ of Ikea.

# With that, the congregation of green philosophers set off on a walk around Sundey Hill Farm.

# Photos from the day please follow this link: <https://www.horsellsfarment.com/>