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ON THE CONCEPT OF *OIKOPHILIA*: TOWARDS AN ORGANIC ENVIRONMENTALISM

Jakob William Bühlmann Quero

Introduction

One of the major issues we face as inhabitants of this common planet is the subject matter of environmentalism, namely the acknowledged need to develop *public and shared* strategies to avoid (or minimize) the noxious consequences of our footprint over the Earth*. In fact, even if it may be the struggle of this century, the normative layer of this question of solidarity with the world in which we live is not new. As we shall see, the history of philosophy brings precise concepts for the definition of environmentalism, but let's start by the *institutional* form, which almost monopolized all the attention and hope to bring sustainable development and care for the planet.

Today we assist at the 26th annual summit of COP (COP standing for "Conference of the Parties") of the United Nations Framework

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Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Glasgow. UNFCCC established, yet in 1992, the urge “to achieve, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Convention, stabilization of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system. Such a level should be achieved within a time-frame sufficient to allow ecosystems to adapt naturally to climate change, to ensure that food production is not threatened and to enable economic development to proceed in a sustainable manner”¹⁵⁴. With the aim of achieving these goals, and trying to advance at each COP, the UNFCCC motivated two major milestones: the *Kyoto protocol* (arising from Kyoto’ 1997 COP) and the *Paris agreement* (as a consequence of the Paris’ 2015 COP).

The common trend of Kyoto and Paris agreements is that they draw clear dispositions for the UNFCCC Parties, being the 196 states and 1 regional organization under the 1992 Convention. Thus, we find that these protocols and agreements provide guidelines and responsibilities for states and regional organizations, namely the Institutional parts of the political and social sphere. At the individual level, the common citizen finds himself stranded and disoriented, without knowing much what to do or who to believe, as it appears that a gap has emerged during this quarter of century, between the political power and the concrete will or ethical engagement to act in accordance with the promise made in Kyoto and Paris. It seems that our representatives totally fail to carry consequently their mandate, or that their role is not fully compatible with a mandate which often is not part of their political agenda. It is puzzling to feel ashamed and responsible for a lack of engagement from our political leaders. In the end, does the common citizen have any responsibility at all?

¹⁵⁴ UNFCCC, *United Nations Framework Convention of Climate Change*. New York, 9 May 1992. URL: https://treaties.un.org/doc/Treaties/1994/03/19940321%2004-56%20AM/Ch_XXVII_07p.pdf

In this article we will assume that the shape, strategy and values of the mainstream environmentalist movement are the upshot of the 1992 UNFCCC, therefore relying on the bureaucratic and complex net of international treaties and interests as a way to engage both civil society and States to reach its goals. To contrast this view, called from now on *Institutional* —because it engages mainly the political and legal sphere—, we will introduce the opposing vision developed by the conservative philosopher Sir Roger Scruton, position we will call *Organic*. Scruton's position will be called organic because it defends a person-based approach relying on the notion of moral, personal responsibility and stewardship. By introducing the organic view, we will present the concept of *Oikophilia*, the core element of his position on environmentalism, concept that fills the void left by the main tendencies. As we shall see, Scruton might help us to think in a more precise way about the defined role of, and how to engage with, civil society.

As we see, the Institutional environmentalism leaves an important gap when develops its strategies and positions, drawing a clear *Top-down* approach and depriving the basic collective of the environmentalist operation, the civil society, of any responsibility or chance to play a role at all: “For it is *we* in the end who have to act, who have to accept and co-operate with the decisions made in our name, and who have to make whatever sacrifices will be required for the sake of future generations”¹⁵⁵. Things being so, the common citizen does not feel impelled to partake neither in simple changes affecting his daily life nor in far-reaching and perhaps more deep solutions.

This is clearly a problem, and it is with the intention of overcoming it that this article presents a possible solution found in a different recipe.

¹⁵⁵ Scruton, Roger (2012), *How to think seriously about the planet: the case for an environmental conservatism*. Oxford: University Press, p. 2.

The Problem

First and foremost, what is the Scrutonian diagnosis?

In the case of environmentalism, it seems to us that Sir Scruton signals two basic problems that call for the solution provided by Oikophilia, the first being the intrinsic character of international politics, treaties and the dynamics of political life¹⁵⁶ —namely, the foundations of the Institutional approach—, and the second being the reason at the very origins of the environmental problem, “the propensity of human beings to take the benefit and leave the costs to someone else, preferably someone far away in space or time, whose protests can be safely ignored”¹⁵⁷. In what follows we will show the focal points of each leg of the Scrutonian diagnosis: the *political* problem and the *human* problem.

The political problem arises from a set of observations on *how, in fact, do things work* compared to *how, ideally, should things work* and, additionally, from general considerations on how could societies cope with problems more effectively.

On one hand, the Scrutonian conservatism is rather reluctant to accept great political initiatives, mainly because they develop control structures far away from the citizenship and are likely to lose its public accountability¹⁵⁸, thus developing secondary interests and secret agendas. History, following the Scrutonian view, shows us that politics,

¹⁵⁶ *Op. cit.*, pp. 15.

¹⁵⁷ Scruton, Roger (Tuesday, 14 February 2012), *How conservatives can help to tackle climate change*, The Guardian. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2012/feb/14/how-conservatives-can-fight-climate-change>

¹⁵⁸ Let’s see, for instance, the case of Scrutonian conservatism on the European Union and its Pro-Brexit position, which exemplifies a general argument against transnational political structures. For a Scrutonian presentation on the subject, see “Nexus Masterclass Roger Scruton ‘Brexit: yes or no?’” (URL: <https://youtu.be/Bvlg8YK3iSU>). For a written account of the Scrutonian general position of transnational structures, see: Scruton, Roger (2019), “Starting from Home”, *How to be a Conservative*. UK: Bloomsbury.

and great political structures, do in fact develop interests and dynamics that do not have anything to do with their initial purposes (in this case, the environmentalist policies) and are instead related to the common political practice and net of internal struggles of power. Furthermore, the logic of politics being its own instead of that of its projects, politicians are rarely likely to risk their own personal careers in the name of *necessary-but-unacceptable* reforms: “Politicians in democracies don’t sign treaties that will commit their voters to unacceptable changes in their way of life. What is the point of signing a treaty if you lose the election that would enable you to enforce it?”¹⁵⁹.

Thus, following Scruton, should we trust the search for a solution of the environmental problem to the hands of those that, as History shows, are likely to hold private interests that sooner or later will decide in their own favor? Do we have to trust in macrostructures of power that soon stop being accountable to citizens? The answer seems clearly to be that, as History shows us, *if possible, rather not*.

On the other hand, and following the political problem, Scruton explores the tension between two poles that seem to be rather opposing: social equilibrium and ecological equilibrium¹⁶⁰. In the case of democratic governments, we see that social equilibrium seems to happen only when there is a clear economic growth. “Periods of stagnation, rapid inflation or impoverishment are also periods of radical discontent, in which resentment and deprivation lead to instability. Hence, the first concern of democratic governments is to encourage economic growth, regardless of its environmental costs”¹⁶¹. Nevertheless, as Scruton remarks, there seems to be a limit to economic growth, represented by the environmental impact of the economic activity. Undeniably, to keep the ecological equilibrium in its place, at some point economic growth

¹⁵⁹ Scruton, Sir Roger. *How conservatives can help tackle climate change...*

¹⁶⁰ Scruton, Sir Roger. *How to think seriously about the planet*, p. 14.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid*, p. 14.

should stop, contradicting one of the basic needs of democratic societies and its classical governmental rule because, again, “Why should a politician put his signature to a treaty when the effect of doing so is that he will be out of office, and therefore unable to press for its enforcement?”¹⁶².

To exemplify this problem, Sir Scruton suggests taking a look into the *monkey business* of the US government regarding its withdrawal from Kyoto Protocols, driven by the potential economic losses (up to \$2.3 trillion, as estimated by experts¹⁶³) and by the Senators, that rapidly calculated the political consequences of such an agreement. Here we find a very clear example of the consequences of leaving into the hands of political structures, with secondary *agendas* like staying in power, such important subjects as the environmental struggle. In any case, it is not only democracies that fall into these internal tendencies that unbalance the scale towards social equilibrium and disregard the ecological. Following Sir Scruton, other political and moral systems do have their own flaws and unbalances, like the communist system has¹⁶⁴ with its more than evident environmental consequences, or the extreme dependence of some economies on natural resources that provoke deforestation, drought, or whatever kind of overconsumption of them. But, if History has shown us that great political structures and economic actors are not to trust to develop this kind of policies and reforms, who should take the lead and be the spear tip of the necessary change?

It is better to do it, Scruton says, with markets, understood as the “form of social network in which individual responsibility is the binding principle”¹⁶⁵, which is to be considered something positive both for the outcome they have when work properly and because they provide

¹⁶² Scruton, Sir Roger. *How to think seriously about the planet*, p. 15.

¹⁶³ Again, for the original references quoted by Sir Scruton, see *ibid.*, p. 15.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p. 91.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid*, p. 138.

society with a sense of responsibility, necessary to protect future generations from greed and destructive actions. Markets, when they are well ordered and are efficient in its aims, do ensure that the costs of the actions are not exported to someone else and motivate, following Sir Scruton, the value of stewardship over the resources at stake —what rational agent would promote the degradation of his own work material, namely nature? The “Tribunal de les Aigües” of València, the Lofoten fishermen communities, the divide of rivers by the Columbian Native Americans, or the common share of the Swiss Alpine meadows, are some of the examples we easily find of this kind of co-operative usage and management of common resources based on the market, making them renewable, self-regenerative and able to accumulate the experience of past conflicts to reach the *best equilibrium* order spontaneously. This solutions, Sir Scruton says, “depend on the rational self-interest of essentially co-operative people. Much of the antipathy to market solutions has come from those who see markets as *competitive* arrangements, in which dog eats dog and the biggest dog survives. But competition in a market depends on co-operation, and it is only co-operatively disposed beings that can make markets work. Markets [...] depend on promise-keeping, conflict resolution and the punishment of cheats. They promote cheerful co-operation between their participants, who for the most part see themselves as engaged in a positive-sum game from which everyone can benefit”¹⁶⁶.

It is true, however, that markets can have bad consequences, and that not always these situations of best equilibrium do happen in our societies. Despite that, and as Scruton puts it, the State centralization is even more dangerous for it can undermine all and every reason the different actors in a situation have to cooperate. In the case of the American treatment of communal grazing rights, as provided by Sir Scruton, the regulation coming from the state provoked an economic

¹⁶⁶ Scruton, Sir Roger. *How to think seriously about the planet*, p. 144.

deficit in the management of the program and, furthermore, as it seemed to overcome the traditional relations between ranchers in a concrete place, the negative externalities became normal, and the malfunctions of the system were finally visible.

Having said that, and serving as a transition to the next point, we are forced to ask ourselves: what could help us, so, into building the conditions to ensure this kind of social co-operation?

We said earlier that the second problem Sir Scruton signals, the one at the origins of the environmental problem, is the human tendency to export the costs to someone else, far away in space or in time (i.e., future generations, or the inhabitants of other countries), and this is exactly what is done in the case of delayer politicians and *big businesses*. Nonetheless, as Sir Scruton reminds us, if we are reading his books we are likely to be living in a free market society, ruled by the laws of the *invisible hand* and the indirect power we hold as consumers. Being things so, it is our choices what, in the end, shape the market and the industry we hold as culprits of the environmental disasters we observe, hence “Whenever we travel by air, visit the supermarket, or consume fossil fuels, we are exporting our costs to others, and to future generations”¹⁶⁷. And despite that, some of us still try to keep the benefits of our lifestyle by passing on the costs of it to others, some of them still to be born.

Following the Scrutonian vision, the basic element that fuels the kind of undesirable trade of costs between the *us* and the *others* and the *living* and the *to live*, is the morals that disregard the future and prevalence of societies, based on the self-interest and the fulfilment of the *present* desires and satisfactions, one that cuts the chain of transmission between the past, the present and the future of our societies. This kind of morals is what makes it difficult to regard any kind of change arising from the

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p. 17.

citizens as possible, and instead forces us to represent, as Sir Scruton puts it, the social interaction as a form of *prisoner's dilemma*.

To make the point clear, the picture of the society following from this morality is one deprived of the chain of responsibilities that could put apart the tendency of delayers or exporters of costs, based upon a theory of motivation we will call *rational self-interest*. In fact, as Sir Scruton puts it, it is the tendency toward this rational self-interest what opens the door to the scenario of the prisoner's dilemma, a situation in which various rational actors must take a decision ignoring what will others do and without communicating, thus probably reaching an outcome different from the best possible scenario. To exemplify the kind of society this self-interest moral creates, let us look into this dilemma¹⁶⁸:

Suppose we meet two friends, called Josep and Bernat, and we tell them to get into separate and uncommunicated rooms and play a totally unknown game for them. In this game, they are told, each will have to take a decision, 1 or 2, with a designated value. If Bernat chooses 1, he will earn 5, and if he chooses 2, he will earn 10; If Josep chooses 1, he will earn 5, and if he chooses 2, he will earn 10 too: so far so good. The dilemma arises when we are told that, depending on the decision of the other player, the outcome can vary: if Bernat chooses 1 and Josep happens to choose 1 too, they will both win 5; if Bernat chooses 1 and Josep chooses 2, Bernat will obtain -5 and Josep will win 10; if Bernat chooses 2 and Josep chooses 1, Bernat will win 10 and Josep will score -5; if both choose 2, both score a symmetrical result 0, thus not earning anything.

Knowing the information and the rules of the game, our position is such that we would expect them to coordinate and try to reach the

¹⁶⁸ Formulation adapted from: Shubik, M. (1970). Game Theory, Behavior, and the Paradox of the Prisoner's Dilemma: Three Solutions. *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 14(2), 181–193. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/173263>

general profit position, this is, both choosing 1 and earning 5. Despite that, the problem appears when, following their own self-interest, and even holding a clearly rational position—for they don't know the secret rule and, even if they knew, they could not trust the other since the most profitable option for them individually would be to choose 2 while the other player chooses 1—, they both choose 2 and end up not earning anything.

Therefore, social choice disparities, understood as the kind of uncoordinated action that gives rise to a situation like the dilemma's, have the chance to keep happening since the conception of morals and society is rather isolationist—namely, atomizes the public life and understands it as the interaction of separate non-cooperative parts that can easily, due to psychological and trust reasons, create up the worst common scenario.

On the contrary, the idea offered by Sir Scruton asks for a remodeling of our conception of motivation—the one we called “rational self-interest”—and recalls some of the basic principles of conservatism, this is, the look for “non-egotistical motives than can be elicited in ordinary members of society, and relied upon to serve the long-term ecological goal. Burke proposed ‘the hereditary principle’, as protecting important institutions from pillage or decay, and believed that people have a natural tendency to accept the limits that this principle places on their conduct. Hegel argued for the priority of non-contractual obligations, of the king that sustain the family, and believed that similar obligations could be recuperated and exercised at the political level. In similar vein, de Maistre gave a central place to piety, as a motive that puts divinely ordained traditions and constitutions above the temptations of self-interest”¹⁶⁹.

This concern, the look for some kind of deep association between individuals, is a recurrent preoccupation of Scruton's work. In fact, as he

¹⁶⁹ Scruton, R. *How to think seriously about the planet*, p. 19.

says, developing a conception of society involving some association inspired in those presented is a *conditio sine qua non* to overcome the kind of problem at the origin of the environmental issues, namely the human problem. We see, for instance, Sir Scruton starts sketching such a vision by recurring to Edmund Burke's philosophical analysis of political legitimation, based on some associative constitution of the political order: "Burke saw society as an association of the dead, the living and the unborn. Its binding principle is not contract, but something more akin to love. Society is a shared inheritance for the sake of which we learn to circumscribe our demands, to see our own place in things as a part of a continuous chain of giving and receiving, and to recognize that the good things we inherit are not ours to spoil. There is a line of obligation that connects us to those who gave us what we have; and our concern for the future is an extension of that line"¹⁷⁰. This framework, skeptical toward the artificial notions of political obligation, invites us to think, as Scruton thinks, that something similar to love, and not necessarily social contract, could show us the path of some sort of mutual attachment, which may not need a higher level of association in a contractual political form. Should we follow this orientation to build a proper conception of society in order to avoid the problems we have been presenting so far?

If so, a second question follows from the present exposition of elements: *thus, what should be done, following Sir Scruton's provisions?*

The Solution

Arising from this *totum revolutum*, we find the solution to surmount the difficulties of the two aspects of the ecological crisis: first, the weakness of the institutional orientation —with its dysfunctionalities

¹⁷⁰ Scruton, R. *How to be a Conservative*, p. 27.

which leave ecological promises without implementation —, and second, the human orientation —which, for the British philosopher, has a strong tendency to favor worst-case equilibrium, instead of creating constructive consensus. In what follows, we will be presenting the main points of *the love for home*, or *Oikophilia*, which may help us to overcome the two previous objections.

Yet in his preface of “How to think seriously about the planet”, Sir Scruton announces his will to look for the family of motives that could give birth to the kind of attitude we are trying to elucidate. These motives, mixed with the conditions under which *oikophilia* could arise, constitute the core of the Scrutonian call for a renewed *ethos*, one respectful with the environment, our past neighbors, ourselves, and the unborn. Regarding the concept, Scruton says¹⁷¹, *oikophilia* may be traced back to the Ancient Greek *oikos*, referring to the household, appearing in words like *economy* and *ecology*. In his sense, *oikophilia* is to be related to a more precise meaning, similar to that of the German word “Heimatgefühl”, something between the melancholic Stimmung of Heimatschmerz (homesickness), a love of one’s own country, and simply celebrating the fact and tender feeling of being home. As Scruton puts it: “Human beings, in their settled condition, are animated by *oikophilia*: 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 lasting contours and an enduring smile. 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 politics, the locus, both real and imagined, where ‘it all takes place’. Virtues like thrift and self-sacrifice, the habit of offering and receiving respect, the sense of responsibility —all those aspects of the human condition that shape us as stewards and guardians of our common inheritance— arise through our growth as persons, by creating

¹⁷¹ Scruton, Sir Roger. *How to think seriously about the planet*. p. 26.

islands of value in the sea of price”¹⁷². Hence the reason behind the name “Organic environmentalism”: this set of elements, that are included in the Oikophilia’ scope as things to preserve, are a basic part of our sentimental, social, and intellectual life, and do constitute the liveliest description of the elements than constitute our life and environment —nevertheless, they are commonly ignored, put apart and disregarded as important parts of life—, thus meriting to be called “Organic” in opposition to the cold, partial and somehow distant “Institutional” approach.

Oikophilia works towards the revaluation of three main elements: beauty as an intrinsic value; the sense of the sacred, which has suffered a strong backlash during this last century; and the power of *Habitat*. All three things are important regarding the objectives of the environmentalist movement and would serve the purpose of developing a moral rooted in the respect and the stewardship of the common heritage, from whatever kind, with an excellent example in the case of the environmental respect. Revaluating beauty, following Scruton, would open the door to see things as what they are and not for what they are useful for; “On the contrary, it is the intrinsic value of beautiful things that renders them useful”¹⁷³. The value beauty enforces, Scruton says, can be compared to that of friendship, being something valuable for the simple thing of being as it is and even helping in some cases with a functional value —giving us a hand in difficult moments, embellishing our daily life, etc. Thus, vindicating the importance of beauty in a world that has forgotten it would make it possible for humanity to retake the old custom of metaphorically lifting up some things to protect them of the erosion of common and negligent activities, the environment being one potential candidate. On the contrary, in a world without beauty as a basic value, the floor is open to the kind of environmental degradation

¹⁷² Scruton, Sir Roger. *How to be a conservative...* p. 32.

¹⁷³ Scruton, Sir Roger. *How to think seriously about the planet*, p. 254.

we are trying to avoid: when beauty disappears from the picture, the only thing left is forms and elements that mean nothing at all, namely the instrumental value as worth of things. If we are to find the main causes of environmental degradation, we will surely find the instrumental vision of the world as one of them, and therefore we know what Oikophilia can remodel as a privileged objective.

Sir Scruton underlines two main assumptions that have brought beauty to the subsidiary state nowadays has. The first “is that beauty is an entirely subjective matter, about which there can be no reasoned argument and concerning which it is futile to search for a consensus”¹⁷⁴. This assumption, which plays an important role in placing tolerance at the center of the ground—for if there are no *absolute* positions on aesthetics, we are never entitled to consider others’ positions as futile, absurd or incorrect—, can be partially dismissed, Scruton considers, if we pay attention to the role beauty plays in some spheres of our public and *shared* life. In some European cities, as Salzburg or Rome, we have seen strong movements of “aesthetic indignation”¹⁷⁵ that evidence a clear command into preserving the visual harmonies and aesthetics these cities have been growing during years, movements that targeted architectural reforms, aesthetically incoherent projects and the promotion of adverts and logos in the public space. Furthermore, we see that in our daily life beauty *already* has an established role in the inheritance we have received from our ancestors in the form of beautiful streets, amazing temples or astonishing castles; Scruton takes this to be the demonstration that beauty is not something entirely subjective, but rather driving us to some sort of communion with the collective body of persons that constitute our society or human group. Aesthetics seem to be, following the Scrutonian vision, something akin to the sort of thing we do when we celebrate our familial customs and rituals, or when we

¹⁷⁴ Scruton, Sir Roger. *How to think seriously about the planet*, p. 257.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 258.

enjoy our communitarian life, or when we pray to our God: “Consider what happens when you lay the table for a meal. This is not just a utilitarian event. If you treat it as such, the ritual will disintegrate, and the family members will end up grabbing individual portions to eat on their own. [...] Everything is controlled by aesthetic norms, and those norms, freely obeyed and freely varied, convey some of the *meaning* of family life. [...] You notice another continuity too, between aesthetic values and piety, which is the recognition that the world is in other hands than ours. Hence the gods are present at mealtimes. Religious people precede their eating with a grace, inviting God to sit down among them before they sit down themselves. This is a use of religion that is very far from the crusading passions of the spiritually needy —religion as an outgrowth of Oikophilia, and a standing invitation to the gods to dwell among us. Such, in a word, is piety. That example shows the centrality of beauty to home-building, and therefore to establishing a *shared* environment”¹⁷⁶. And this, the shared character of beauty and its social and communitarian shape, is the best guarantee of the *not-so-subjective* character of beauty and its human relevance, being at the core of every environmentalist possible vindication. Furthermore, and attacking the main assumption in more theoretical grounds, Sir Scruton considers the divide between subjective and objective to be a rather imprecise one. In fact, as he considers, aesthetical judgments arise from a social and shared background individuals have, not expressing neither preferences nor simple singular points of view: “I prefer to say that our judgments of beauty are bids for a socially recognized *presence*. They do not express simple preferences, to be traded in the market of desire. They are bound up with the social identity of those who express them, and who wish others to acknowledge and endorse the choices that they make”¹⁷⁷.

¹⁷⁶ Scruton, Sir Roger. *How to think seriously about the planet*, p. 263.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 264.

The second assumption Sir Scruton signals as the culprit of the decay of beauty as a social and shared value is the consideration that it does not matter and, therefore, does not have any right to place a limit to economic growth. The major proof, though an evident one, is the strict importance it has in every *aesthetic* conflict we introduced before, or the relevance aesthetics have when we file a complaint to police because our new neighbor is cutting all the shared trees that embellish the street, or the universal character of the aesthetic consensus among societies: “The Italian hilltop town of stone and tile is very unlike the Zulu village with its huts of mud and grass and its church of corrugated iron, but they both obey aesthetic constraints, in which individual differences are softened and made acceptable by a common style”¹⁷⁸. Thus, it seems clear to Sir Scruton that the importance of beauty, and the aesthetical life, is already present in our daily activities and that in fact *it does already play a vital role in economy, politics and, in the end, our public and shared life*.

Both assumptions being buried, Sir Scruton considers it to be proved that *beauty matters*, and it is in fact a vital element of human life and flourishing, thus deserving a special attention in our lives and even more when it comes to build a strong environmentalist moral. In any case, Oikophilia still need a basic part, the vindication and recuperation of the importance of the sacred, basic to develop the social value of stewardship and the respect for our environment as part of our familiar, emotional and personal life. This, the element of the sacred in nature, is an unperishable string that, following Sir Scruton, has manifested itself in human societies as far away in time as books and witnesses can show us, keeping itself alive in nowadays poetry, literature, diverse forms of art, and even in local protectionist movements. In fact, “This motive is a human universal, and as Simon Schama has argued, in his beautiful tribute to landscape art and to the myths and mysteries of settlement, land and landscape have been portrayed as sacred in all our human

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 265.

attempts to belong in the world”¹⁷⁹. The cataloguing of our natural surroundings as sacred, for they represent our familial and personal *Oikos*, still is available to us to use, but we must thoroughly look for it in order to make it a possible social and shared value for a new conception of life to come.

The uses of this conception of nature as a sacred thing would open the door to treat our surroundings in a deeply responsible and serious manner, remembering the ways in which we treat some religious objects and calling us to its conservation and protection: “Sacred things have a peculiar status, being both removed from us and deeply connected to our wellbeing. That which is sacred cannot be touched by profane hands. But on special occasions, marked out by ritual and acts of purification, it can be bent to our uses. The priest, the acolyte and the initiate can participate in the communion and drink the Eucharistic wine. The uninitiated and the unbelievers commit sacrilege by doing the same”¹⁸⁰.

In the architectural case, Sir Scruton brings to the mind the sense of Oikophilia applied to the acts of *building* and *designing* future buildings by using the words of John Ruskin, romantic English writer of XIXth century and prominent defender of the aesthetics of architecture and the conservation of original structures and materials. In this sense, Oikophilia would prompt us to build and design our constructions as if they were a sacred reverence to the Eternal, forcing the builder or the architect to “detach himself from earthly interests and calculations, set aside material goals, and offer instead a gift to all creation, one that will outlast each fleeting function that it serves”¹⁸¹. We see here, as Sir Scruton puts it, a clear exercise of revitalizing the sense of the sacred and to make it take the entire dominion of what surrounds as in some sort of practice vindicating the material and immediate presence of the sacred.

¹⁷⁹ Scruton, Sir Roger. *How to think seriously about the planet*, p. 284.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 286.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 287.

This, Scruton says, is the other basic element that is needed for the environmental movements to take as companion, sewing a new orientation for the ecological struggle that arises from the community and striving to protect what is beloved, what is valued, and what has shaped our own character and life.

The third element, basic in the development of a concept of Oikophilia, is the development of a notion like Habitat, that tries to close the reformist circle in favor of a society of solidarities and respectful with the famous *chain of giving and receiving* we introduced earlier, as well as the will to endow it to the next generations.

Society, following the Scrutonian vision, is a net of mutual trust and intimal relations that shape our own most basic emotions, skills, and interests, giving us complex and elevated moral concepts and sentiments. This net of rights, duties and obligations are the upshot, following Sir Scruton, of “the fact that we hold each other accountable for what we do”¹⁸². Following this picture, we find that our societies, in having moral constraints and dispositions, do consider their own members as responsible and non-determined subjects, masters of a conscience that develops within this net of particular qualities that is the collective human flourishing. In doing so, it seems there is at the least a slight-yet-deep fracture between *our* world and the *raw* animal world in the sense that we seem to be rational.

For some anthropological tendencies, from the rationality of human beings we can infer its completely unattached and individual character, branded as *Homo economicus*. This creature, “as described by theories of he market, is a one-dimensional creature, rational certainly, but with no conception of the ends of life, no idea that desires can be judged and found wanting, no ability to renounce what he wants for the sake of what he values”¹⁸³. Of course, Sir Scruton says, this is not the real

¹⁸² Scruton, Sir Roger. *How to think seriously about the planet*, p. 212.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 214.

human being, which is full of not-always-rational motives, motives that could never be explained by reason or science, and that are far away from our acknowledged and conscious interests, desires and expectations. It is in this sphere of things *that lie deeper than reason*, as Sir Scruton puts it, that the answer to the problem of the conservation of our famous *chain* is to be found.

The Scrutonian position, thus, gives Oikophilia a third leg by vindicating the importance of our natural affections towards our neighbors, families, friends... crystallized in the possibility of our moral life. "At both levels —the instinctive and the personal— the capacity for sacrifice arises, in the one case as a blind attachment, in the other case as a sense of responsibility to others, to the gods of to the moral law. It is in these areas, it seems to me, that we must search for the motive that will rectify our lamentable disposition, as rational beings, to inflict the costs of our pursuits on those who have not incurred them. The motive that emerges with full persuasive force as both levels is that of Oikophilia, the love of home, a motive that comprehends all our deepest attachments, and which spills over in the moral, aesthetic and spiritual emotions that transfigure our world, creating in the midst of our emergencies a shelter that future generations also may enjoy"¹⁸⁴.

We see, therefore, that Oikophilia would serve the purpose of seeing the importance of the invisible thread that unites persons under a same family, community or society, and would of course motivate its members to avoid, as we said earlier, keeping the benefits of whatever endeavors by exporting the risks and costs to whoever, be it a neighbor, another nation of the future generations.

At the start of the article, we introduced two main difficulties that, following Sir Scruton, obscure the path of the environmentalist movement. First, that it seems to extremely rely over institutions and political structures, and we showed that History and facts tell us this is a

¹⁸⁴ Scruton, Sir Roger. *How to think seriously about the planet*, p. 214-215.

bad idea. Second, that at the roots of the environmental problem there is an erroneous social and moral conception that manifests itself in economy, politics and social relations, namely the tendency to keep the benefits exporting the costs and to think societies are amalgamations of self-accounting rational individuals; Sir Scruton showed us both things are incorrect, instead placing at the center the importance of understanding society as a net of solidarities and collaboration between citizens that strive to protect the world —both social and natural— in order to pass it on to the next generations.

To solve both issues, Sir Scruton introduces the concept of *Oikophilia*. The basis of the environmentalism we called *Organic* is rooted in *Oikophilia*, a concept purporting to vindicate the importance of some relevant, perhaps old-fashioned, values that could still awake the sense of stewardship and responsibility that once kept humanity in a position of self-awareness. First, we see that the vindication of beauty as a value in itself would open the door to abandon the utilitarian point of view and instead place a natural worth over environment, changing the vision we have on nature and aesthetics as something necessary that appeals to our most inner needs. Second, reinstate the sense of the sacred and making it a social value would allow us to properly motivate respect and reverence towards concrete aspects of our shared life and space, as the environment, communal spaces, natural resources, etc. Third, acknowledging the importance of the net of human relations and bonds we trace among the individuals in a society would, following Scruton, valorize the importance of preserving the chain of transmission between generations as a basic social, and environmental, element.

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