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The Good Life – a quality and purpose defined approach to action:

**An enquiry for thinking and action in climate,
the environment and the social sciences.**

CRAIGANOUR, SCOTLAND
May 30th - June 1st, 2022



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This note summarises discussions advanced in 2022 within a meeting and as part of a process (the Learning by Doing project) that aims to advance an interdisciplinary dialogue between economists, philosophers, theologians and climate policy experts, so as to develop visions of what a 'good life 2 to 1.5 C degree rise in temperature' could look like in specific places. The specific places the project is focusing on are Mexico, the Dominican Republic, Lebanon, South Africa, and the Latin American region. Examples were also drawn from the UK and the EU, where various participants lived.

The project emerged after a long period of research, starting in the mid to late 2000s, trying to calculate situations where societies could be modelled with very low emissions (70-80% below 1990 emission levels). As calculations go, 40-50% reductions may be possible by improving efficiency in technology, 30-40% by changing relations between sectors, transport and housing, energy and industry etc. It becomes impossible to go further than that without modelling and understanding new ways of life. Global net zero cannot be achieved without entirely different models of life, but net zero is what is required to stabilise the climate. Unavoidable climate impacts will complicate the picture. In all cases, it remains an open question to imagine what good ways of life would look like as societies emerge in the transitions towards these reductions and impacts. What we are thus pursuing is not only finding a just transition, but one that leads to a good life.

Leaving for the moment the practical need to revisit what a good life is to one side, the most important reason for choosing a good life focus is the fact that being good people and leading good lives are ends to which most people aspire, and a debate framed in such terms is one that will resonate with the greatest number of people as a result. We propose to conjure a vision of a genuinely desirable future, and learn how better to desire and to act so as to achieve this future. We will have this realisation as our aim, and then use this aim as a guide to imagine the associated emissions and impact profiles, and what might help for this future to come forward, from the bottom up.

The entailed interaction between the social sciences and the humanities to achieve this goal aims to answer not only technical and political questions but the deeper ones, necessary to imagine not just a survivable life, but a good one. It is an open question whether economists and policy experts alone may be able to satisfactorily envision what this transition would look like; likewise, whether those from the humanities may deliver on their own the technical aspects of such a vision. Approaching the subject in this way may help to avoid some of the mistakes frequently made by climate modellers and policy makers that operate in the field at present. Removing agency from the individual is not a part of the good life; nor is increasing the wealth and power of an influential party or over-emphasising the dangers that may or may not come of a warmer climate. We hope our 'solutions' will not appear as impositions; we hope they will appear as opportunities.

The conversations which this process builds upon, aims to be open and seeks to pursue a real debate, without the pretension by the conveners or participants of providing all the answers in advance. An interdisciplinary approach contributed to this, where different levels of conversation (philosophy, political economy and political and economic modelling) were acknowledged, and where participants built on each other's interventions to contribute to the debate. The results from these conversations were taken as something more akin to an icon that continuously points beyond itself, rather than solely as an idol we pursue for its own sake.



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In this context, what follows outlines the key points of an initial debate by such a group of economists, philosophers, theologians and climate policy experts at the Craiganour estate in Perth, Scotland between May 31st and June the 1st, 2022. In line with the project question, these conversations focused on how a good life compatible with a 2-1.5 degree increase in temperature would look like, and what in the current ways of thinking and acting in late liberal modernity may be impeding or facilitating a renewed effort to pursue ways of life compatible with these futures. This recollection describes first what was discussed regarding a diagnosis of the problem, and then a summary of the philosophical, political economy, and politics and policy issues that emerged during these conversations. They accompany a separate transcript of these conversations.

Diagnosis: the climate debate, and ways of thinking and acting

An initial part of the conversation focused on a renewed understanding of how the way we tend to act and desire is frequently associated with the way we tend to think and value within the liberal societies most participants live in, and how to go beyond the limits of liberal thinking and desiring as a way to address the climate problem. While climate change has many more dimensions, how some forms of modernity think about the climate problem and how these forms tend to frame solutions to it might in itself be part of the problem.

In the conversation about liberal modernity, there was a sense that the most market-advancing dominant liberal modernity tends to presume that most agents are for the most part at odds with each other and with nature. This position further holds that individuals are incapable of advancing any collective purpose beyond those related to self-fulfilment—in competition with others—and these goals are advanced by fighting or controlling nature. This liberal modernity position takes persons as individuals constrained by multiple restrictions, arising from history, place, or nature. Liberating these individuals from their multiple perceived constraints and managing the ensuing conflicts amongst themselves and with nature requires a coordinating politics associated with the state; in contemporary terms, this coordinating politics is frequently, crucially, aided by social media, information concentration, and increasingly powerful capital concentrations. Imagination in this social and political development context is taken by these increasingly centralised networks to be purely a source of fictions or entertainment, rather than one aiming for co-creation where humans and nature flourish while interacting. This market-driven, liberally styled, socio-economic context may in turn seek to highlight greed or lust if going politically right or left, seeking to transform private vices into public benefits, but in all cases the resulting consumption wins, while a sense of shared, bottom up agency and imaginative creativity for the environment and broader society diminishes. Beyond those consumption-driven social platforms, (larger) businesses may lead in satisfying the individualistic and mimetic desires these platforms create, while nature is diminished into a resource to be used to achieve these outcomes.

The absence of any substantive ‘good life’ considerations beyond subjective and individual value constructions is a dominant shared characteristic across the current political spectrum in liberal and secularised countries.

Beyond these modern liberal visions, there are other ways of defining the good life. Common good traditions centred around substantive political values, and metaphysically and theologically high conceptions of a substantively moral and devout way of life compatible with essential human dignity are, for example, still a living feature of Western culture’s Aristotelian and Christian heritage. Many cultural and wisdom traditions alive in Africa, Asia and Latin America likewise share different visions of what a good life is meant to be,



different to those of liberal modernity. In contrast to many of them and as mentioned above, liberal secular modernity has no conception of the sacred or of intrinsic common values and substantive understandings of the common good. The consumerism associated with liberal modernity is most frequently integral with the natural resource exploitation and associated emissions driving climate change. Even so, while liberal consumerism doubtless advances material and privately defined goods to many people, this is but one life-world system of goods delivery, and richer thought about alternatives are obviously needed.

As it emerged in conversation, a good life was perceived instead as a pursuit aiming at the cultivation of character, community and right desire. This cultivation of the common good would prioritise aims in life in a different way to that of liberal

modernity, emphasising wherever possible a communitarian search for meaning through increased relationality, imaginative creativity, and shared productivity in embedded social contexts. The good life in these contexts would aspire to a convivially shared search for and contemplation of the good, the beautiful, and the true. This aspiration would be aided by a social and institutional environment that fosters rather than hinders such a convivial search. It may be noted, in characterizing this search for a 2-1.5 compatible society, that these aims articulated around the search for such a good life are valuable for most people in themselves, regardless of the climate related aspects of this search, or



of any form of government intervention. On the other hand, however, this characterisation of a good life does indeed imply less emissions and more resilience than current thinking. It does not seem to be the case that the climate problem will be resolved within a culture of frequently rapacious disregard for natural resources and the common good.

When contrasting post-secular and traditional conceptions of the good life with that of secular liberal modernity, the latter—for its own preservation—is (a) philosophically quiet on any substantively meaningful ‘good’ lifestyle in light of any climate discussion; (b) politically dependent on state regulation, market power, and information control to manage competition and conflict, and our relationship with nature; (c) developmentally envisions nature as a mostly inert or hostile resource to be managed, (d) provides human imagination and culture no compelling force towards any form of co-creation between culture and nature; and (e) places any continuity between culture and nature in a rather diminished position. In this context, bottom up localised community agency becomes much diminished, as does education and the cultivation of practices and virtues that foster any increased social mutuality and reciprocity. among society-members (except



in exclusive co-operative ventures); so is the more general exercise of associated practical and political virtues across society.

All this is relevant to our project. The shortcomings of these modern liberal characteristics highlight the need for new political visions and new capacities for action capable of inspiring and delivering agency for change, embedded within society, beyond the more limited sources of agency and solutions that governments or (big) business may propose.

This becomes more relevant as we consider the scale of the problem. As Luis Miguel Galindo noted, between 9-17% of global GDP will be required to allow for a transition to a net zero target; yet such a task cannot be accomplished without large sectors of the population acting on their own volition, with creativity and

imagination to achieve these goals. As Adrian Pabst remarked ‘the Thatcherite/ Reagan order [seems like] a zombie order; it is dead and is not coming back to life. It is here only because it cannot yet be replaced. The same is true for most other political traditions, they are all pretty dead and lacking energy’. Attempting to reinforce either the dead left or the dead right might not be enough; something new must arise. The insufficiency of the left-right political divide was a common thread, as a purely centralised-state system cannot have

all the information necessary to run society and may lead to tyranny, whilst a purely market model may find it difficult to find new ways to go beyond the lead of the search for profits for products. Any system is fallible and vulnerable to abuse, and some may consider political systems as being prone to abuse for the benefit of exclusive power-wielding actors—and even non-power-wielding actors could be prone to “gaming”, which in a collective environment would become a collective abuse of the socio-political system, even if individual actions are seen as irrelevant. The solution is neither pure capitalism, nor pure social democracy, nor autocracy. Not the US, not Sweden, not North Korea.

The shortcomings of the dominant liberal modernity are more salient when considering a 2-1.5° society. The stability of the political regimes upon which current societies rest requires access to more and more natural resources and associated emissions, or, alternatively, are reliant on increased forms of control, while at the same time increasingly precluding new paths for more creative ways for human desire and action, from the bottom up. A new way of addressing these problems implies a new philosophy. To these we now turn.





Philosophy and Political Philosophy

The discussion on the philosophical aspects of a new way of thinking about social and political development centred on describing elements to characterise a vision of a “good life”, identifying the philosophical reasons that have prevented most versions of modernity to take the pursuit of a good life as a motivating political factor, and on finding aspects of different forms of modernity which might deliver it. These reasons were associated with the (faltering) leading role that liberalism is providing. This critique was not taken to be linked to an aspiration for an anti-liberal or anti-modern way of thinking or living. Instead, that critique aimed to develop a post-liberal order within a different modernity. This post liberal order, while preserving the rule of law, and a free economy capable of being embedded in the various societies and communities it arises from, would seek to follow as many of the ancient principles which liberalism has taken as its own, while at the same time think beyond the constraints that liberal articulation in modernity entails, particularly when searching for a good life in the context of a 2 -1.5 degree transition.

The debate started by discussing better and worse versions of modernity. Thomas Hobbes, more than John Locke, was taken as marking the beginning of liberal modernity. Hobbes’ legacy was associated with the worst kind of modernity: one that presumes an inescapable and never-ending natural conflict as the underlying root of society, which can only be overcome by positing a pact that grants sovereignty to a central entity. In the contemporary incarnation of this liberal modernity, conflict must be managed endlessly by this increasingly technocratic centre, which sees any substantive pursuit of the good as mostly dangerous at worst, or excused as naive at best, and our relation with nature characterised simply as the management of resources. The entailed abandonment of a sense of excellence, and the pursuit of the good in our relation with each other and with nature, most often translates into the avoidance of evil -or the continuous search for the lesser evil- as a goal. This abandonment of a sense of substantive excellence progressively translates into the pursuit of increasingly dismal outcomes. As John Milbank argued, if we fail to consider the spiritual concerns of humanity ‘we will likely pose flourishing in brutally material terms’, which is an unsatisfying existence. Where genuine human purpose is missing, genuine human flourishing may also be lost as with no ‘real’ purpose we cannot ‘really’ fulfil it, making flourishing a subjective tendency which could thus only be satisfied by brute materiality or consumerism. As Philip Gonzalez noted, the essentially mimetic nature of desire in modernity only further reinforced consumerism, making the problem and its climate consequences much worse. Moreover, as society was increasingly seen as resulting from a posited social pact, including the use of resources, this minimised the ongoing, relational character of social life, and diminished the role that mutual gifts and exchanges of multiple kinds provided in making life in common to flourish, while at the same taking nature simply as resources available, ready to be taken.

In fact, the poverty of the dominant philosophical traditions’ ability to speak about meaning in one’s life, not only fed the materialism necessary to support a consumerist culture that is not only eating out the ideological credibility of today’s liberalism, but is also not conducive to lower levels of emissions, and frequently the contrary. As Paul Tyson put it, addressing these issues requires ‘[going] beyond the [mostly] technocratic, materialist response which not only ignores the cause of the problem, but encourages everyone onto the consumerist developmental pathway that is the cause of the problem. An alternative telos, focused on the



essential dignity of the human, and on flourishing, seems closer to finding a sensible way out of the crossroad we are at.'

As this debate progressed, it started to outline some of the elements of what a different and better form of modernity might entail, more compatible with a 2-1.5° future. This modernity would emphasise a continuity rather than a break with nature, and see nature more as a gift than as a given; assume a role for human creativity that takes culture as building upon and continuing human interaction with nature, providing a much more salient role for human and natural agency. In its emphasis on human creativity, imagination would become much more symbolic, and be seen as a faculty through which human beings envision emerging aspects of reality and advance to co-create them with each other and with nature. As Stephen Hawking so aptly put it, "many things are possible, but first, you have to imagine them." Moreover, with its emphasis on localised bottom up agency within societies and communities, this approach would support finding ways to avoid increasingly damaging concentration of capital, resources and information characteristic of the heavy environmental exploiters of our age.

Highlighting teleology also changed the tone of the debate. In addressing the presumed lack of any possible collective teleology within the social sciences, Paul Tyson noted that this lack of any form of teleology is a feature in the Anglo-American tradition, but a "yes, sort of" form of teleology was possible in the German "Sciences of the Spirit" tradition. In the German social sciences tradition, a purpose can be identified as part of a shared culture and traditions, which in turn provides a sense of collective, shared purpose to members. The LBD project had in fact been using this approach to identify shared purposes in the countries where it operates. Harald Winkler also noted the increased use within the IPCC working groups of these forms of teleological analysis, through the use of scenarios. However, this "yes, sort of" teleology does not imply any knowledge about reality, simply a form of a shared belief. Beyond this "yes, sort of" teleology, Tyson also argued that a "yes, truly" version could also be identified. Following John Milbank and William Desmond arguments, Tyson argued that analogical approaches, while partial and limited -i.e. analogical- allow for poetry, literature and art to culturally mediate our relation to nature, allowing us not only to present natural reality as a merely inert resource, but in many aspects as it mysteriously and beautifully really is. This provides a sense of purpose





and value to the world where culture and nature are closely allied, rather than separated. The project's own development of graphic art and novels is aligned to this understanding.

In this context, As Allison Milbank noted 'instead of apocalyptic narratives we need positive visions of beauty; positive visions that will encourage a pursuit, an adventure, a hunt for beauty, an attempt to bring this beautiful vision about'. This was particularly relevant for the question of climate as environmental questions are often like religious studies—they are asked in a negative sense, in terms of scarcity and sacrifice. Why not study them in the positive sense? Modeling good scenarios following poetic and analogical insights through

imagination can improve our sense of agency and urgency to act. Otherwise, the purely negative can lead to depression and anxiety, instead of hope and agency.

This more affirmative debates brought to the fore a key forgotten aspect in climate debates: beauty. The fact is, as John Milbank argued, 'there is less and less care about beauty anymore'. However, rather than abandoned, beauty may be taken instead to be both the correct standard for perception as well as a common good we share; a guide both in the search for a metaphysically real analogical telos as well as to how this search may be translated into action. Beauty attracts us by nature and points us to the

goodness in the world that is there; a way to allow us to make nature and the human flourish. It also motivates us in a way a market/state based liberalism is mostly unable to deliver. As Alex Draper put it 'if you use your imagination to imagine a future and you find that future beautiful then you will work to bring it about, without force, simply because it is beautiful.

The alternative political philosophy that emerged seemed to be in dialogue with a politics permeated with a strong character of interrelation, reciprocity, mutuality and beauty. A philosophy where, rather than prompting one to have and enjoy more and more, mostly on one's own, would focus instead on being more and more the best one could be, mostly in the interrelationality of community. These communities could operate at various levels, and were seemed to be consolidated and expanded through interactions, including through gift exchanges.

The role of gift exchanges became an important underlying aspect of the conversation. As noted, gift exchanges were taken to be underlying multiple social transactions. These transactions were not only to be restricted solely to the anonymous exchanges that take place alongside contracts and prices in markets; in fact, the creation of reciprocal links, frequently were not of a purely anonymous character, but one where





mutual care between the parties involved may also increasingly emerge. Adam Smith's anonymous and purely instrumental relation between the butcher and his customer was not taken to be the sole model for an economy; instead, the role of gift exchanges were also taken to be a relevant model, one that made an economy of care and conviviality more visible.

In fact, in a quest for a good life, the understanding of society as a web of relations that include a mutual exchange of gifts becomes likewise much more salient.. In the visit the group made to the alternative communities of Findhorn bay and Pluscarden Abbey, Alison Milbank noted the shared spiritual character and the underlying and continuous gift exchanges that characterised both. She also singled out a story told to the group by a monk at Pluscarden, who recalled when the community needed to flatten some land for a dam. Instead of purchasing or renting expensive machinery, he bought beer as a gift, and invited people to drink and dance together. Through their stomping, they end up doing all the work. This story is meant to show how a thinking rooted in a 'specific and keen understanding of people' and 'the exchange of mutual gifts' can become an alternative to a thinking that focuses exclusively on abstract economic incentives. It also intended to show the unexpected aspects of relationality as an ever-present part of our social systems, one we frequently fail to consider when society is seen as resulting solely from a pact. As Pabst noted, 'most goods are relational goods, you need interaction and you need an 'other'... all the highest things in life are things we must share.' Likewise, education requires trust and dedication between student/teacher, not merely contracting two individuals. Many other crucial goods also depend on relations and sharing.

Through these conversations, a vision of a good life seemed to emerge in the debate, one made possible within carbon and climate limits associated with a politics of beauty, inter-relationality, reciprocity, gift exchanges, and imaginative creativity. A communitarian mutualism of sorts, which could be named 'post-liberalism'. A view of the entailed good life in these politics, outlined in positive terms, would thus include a renewed education and cultivation geared towards the active pursuit and contemplation of the good, beautiful and excellent in multiple realms; a pursuit and development of creativity and co – creation by humans with nature, led and enhanced by a much more active role for the imagination; and an increased conviviality and relationality in specific places across society, which would entail increased interaction and interrelation, mutuality and reciprocity, and local action. A local supportive institutional environment and infrastructure would help bring more of these aspects to the fore.





It is important to note that these components about a good life in a 2 – 1.5 future imply on the one hand very low emissions, and on the other, an enhanced creative relation with each other and with nature. This flourishing of humans, side by side with nature, would go well beyond an increased resilience. It would focus on how to imaginatively address in solidarity across socio-economic levels in society the emerging impacts that climate change will increasingly cause and working with nature for such a flourishing to happen. It would imply enhancing social and natural agency, and a vision of person and nature as creators in a beauty defined dialogue. It would push beyond the emasculation that results when persons are taken simply as consumers or activists, and nature simply as resource. Such an emasculation becomes more and more frequent as surveillance capitalism and financial power becomes more and more concentrated in liberal societies.

In this context, these forms of a “good life” would be better characterised as a shared debate, a discovery, and a progressive transformation (and preservation) of new (and existing) forms of life and traditions in line with more communitarian aspects, rather than an unwarranted regulatory imposition, a political mandate, or a rather anonymous technocratic management by the state or government. Nevertheless, this vision also requires addressing issues of political economy and policy. To these issues we now turn.

Political Economy and Economics

What would such a notion of a good life look like in political economy terms? How we perceive nature, culture, and human action affects our own vision of what is possible in terms of collective action, in the polity and the economy. As is well known, collective action problems bedevil climate action at all levels, from the local to the international. How the actions of individuals translate into collective responses is also at the core of the problems that liberal theory and action presumes to solve, particularly within the Anglo-American liberal tradition of the social sciences. In the absence of clear property rights, or explicit regulation or privatization, the possibility of collective action is taken to be slim. The conflictual nature of society and the free riding desire that presumably pervades it is taken to translate in most cases into individuals and groups taking from common resources without limits, thus fatally depleting them. The resulting “tragedy of the commons” as described by Garrett Hardin and Mancur Olson, is seen as arising from this lack of means to sustainably pursue shared collective outcomes – an indictment about the failure of a sustainable commonly upheld teleology. In this view, failures in climate action are seen as no exception to this general rule.

A debate ensued as to whether the vision of a good life lacked any grounds in light of these more liberal minded political economy visions of collective visions of action. In this context, in arguing about the different levels of discussion (philosophical and political economy), Harald Winkler, John Milbank and Jose Garibaldi argued around the work on collective action by Elinor Ostrom, which merited the Nobel memorial prize in economics. It was argued that her work was much more akin to the more relational and truly teleological versions of the good life advanced previously in the debate, on the one hand; and quite relevant to climate conversations, on the other. Ostrom work distinguished itself by examining empirically the development of institutions that allowed successful cases of collective goods to prosper, rather than by following a-priori theoretical models ultimately inspired by Hobbes’ leviathan, Olson’s collective action, or by pure privatization. Instead of assuming the inherent conflict those models presume, Ostrom showed that there were multiple cases of commonly pooled resources, which rather than inevitably resulting in a tragedy of the commons, were stably



and successfully managed, even against Olson's predictions.

In the debate, it was noted that the successful cases Ostrom found were akin to the more relational society described previously - one characterised by a capacity to communicate, to share information, to build trust and reciprocity, and by the co-creation by actors of means to coordinate and exchange actions jointly – akin to the 'specific understanding of people and places' and 'gift exchanges' noted above. This illustrated how the pursuit of a good life as characterized previously, and the successful management of the problems bedeviling climate change may quite well co-exist and support each other positively. It also illustrated the importance of humbly and empirically examining problems, rather than presuming solutions based on predetermined theoretical menu -or, as what is known as Elinor Ostrom's maxim states, by "allowing for what is possible in practice, to also be possible in theory".

Having relationality and teleology as core guiding principles may likewise allow one to see more cooperative games on the international arena, rather than mostly a succession of zero-sum games, where what one side gains, another loses. Harald Winkler and Jose Garibaldi noted in this context that the management of the climate regime can be seen to also rely on characteristics similar to those that Ostrom noted in her work: a kind of shared sense of transparency, mutual trust building, and information sharing as the underlying elements that facilitate the operation of the regime itself. These characteristics went well beyond the impossible centralizing role that any government or state might provide, or a world of universal rules asking equal tasks from everyone.

In fact, it was also argued that cooperation towards a stable climate benefit in the UNFCCC convention itself could well be taken to be ultimately teleological. As Jose Garibaldi noted, there were multiple unrecognised teleological aspects of the climate convention. Key amongst them was that it had a declared aim, focused on "avoiding dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate". In pursuit of this aim, the other various principles -e.g. equity, common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, etc. – came into being as shared goals of the members of the convention. In a similar manner, the Paris Agreement also posits shared goals, and then asks members to pursue these aims, not in absolute terms, but starting from their





own situation and pursuing various excellences – they must do as best as they can and contribute to the Paris common goal (again, an aim or purpose after all) in various ways, as well as on building capacity, increasing capacity, etc.

Moreover, if climate country cooperation is teleological, new ways of understanding international action and its associated costs may emerge. In fact, if -as Paris envisions it- climate stabilisation is pursued by all countries at different levels, and all climate costs are considered, effective differentiated mitigation cooperation delivers benefits that can be taken as a common good. In the pursuit of this common good, these countries' interactions need not be zero sum-thus, what one party gains, another needs not lose. This is so as the addition of these emission reductions deliver a lower amount of aggregated collective climate impacts, a reduction in impacts that may be enjoyed by all. Moreover, these impacts, and the associated adaptation costs, are the major costs that substantially more numerous middle and low income countries in the world face, rather than mitigation. Impact costs also tend to grow faster than mitigation. Thus, for most countries (and certainly for the project countries), the common pursuit of differentiated mitigation will result in reducing the costs that are larger and grow faster (i.e. impacts and adaptation), at the expense of the costs that are smaller and grow less (i.e. mitigation). Thus, international cooperation renders local benefits for the substantial majority of UNFCCC parties..

In this vein, the relations we make with each other in society may also be taken to be part of this common good, and valuable on their own, and not only because they provide benefits. This emphasis on the common good might indeed help transform the character of the society -local or international- we live in. The political economy work of Luigino Bruni was singled as moving in this direction, considering a shared teleology and interrelation. In his game theory work on collective action, Bruni argues that relations between agents and their character matter in the characterization of any game, and not only the payoffs. By this claim, he means to say that one needs not to presume all actors are homogeneously bent on free riding or benefitting at each other's expense in a standoff. If actors are heterogeneous, and not all are always at odds with each other, there may also be the chance that someone from the population -local or international- might make a gift that prompts a response with another, and thus helps broker ways out of deadly stalemates, a way out which may result in benefits for all. At the end of the day, the trick is for some in the population to find out how to manage the risk of being wise sometimes, and make a risky gift when it is the right thing to do to break a stalemate. As Paulo Garibaldi and Paul Tyson noted, this tends to be the role of minorities that lead changes of bear witness, as creative minorities and martyrs have historically been. They also tend to change societies towards the good while doing so.

These options for collective action that Ostrom, Bruni, the Paris Agreement and the discussion above articulated, resonate well with the previous debate, the one that considers the metaphysical understanding of our relations with each other. As John Milbank stated, the analogy of the gift works both horizontally and vertically; the more things are pulled together horizontally, the more they provide a sense of ascendance. This manifests itself in things like gift exchange and sharing; it is never just a matter of two people deciding to do something for each other; exchange is about love and sharing is about justice—both are needed. As he stated “One cannot have love and fellowship without justice, and justice without love is just tyranny. The higher aspect is all important. If what we do doesn't have symbolic valence reaching towards transcendence, then it is worthless; if we aren't seeing nature as a book of symbols directing us towards the ultimate then what we are seeing is demonic”.



Pabst further argued that these considerations, and the role of imagination in making viable a better future, not only highlighted the promise of the “yes, truly” version of the social sciences, but more significantly for the political economy aspects, reflected an underlying movement within these sciences. Pabst argued this movement was shifting more generally the social sciences away from brute materialism, harsh positivism -and hard indicators- towards a post-positivist approach. In this light, economics would become more of a moral science, building on shared interests - those of family, meaning and purpose; of work, place and beauty, rather than the purely selfish and atomic motivations of individuals. These shared interests amounted to a more convivial economics of care and belonging. There still remains an engrained positivism and materialism; one where materialism and idealism end up being two sides of the same coin. Luigino Bruni, Stefano Zamagni were starting to bridge this gap; rather than being on the fringes of the profession, they are already writing textbooks to teach the next generations of economists. This move went well beyond the Keynesians and post Keynesian terms of the economic theory discussion, towards and economics more oriented towards purpose and meaning.

A key remaining aspect to address in this debate is about political agency. We do not want the state to solve all problems, not only because this can decay into tyranny, but because impersonality erodes reciprocity. A good life in a 2 -1. 5 world will include being a valued member of a community, not just being kept alive in a community. Membership and agency here implied a discussion about political agency and policy.



Politics and Policy

The debates above underlined the need for new understandings of action and economics and for accompanying policy sets to achieve a transition to a society compatible with a 2 -1.5 degree future and the associated climate impacts. This may be better understood as a transition to a good life, and not solely to lower levels of emissions and impacts. The character of this transition exemplifies certain policies that such a (post-liberal) political economy would promote.

The goal of a good life as understood above might be an unexpectedly realistic source for bottom up action, particularly as times of increased social fragmentation beckon. It reflects the desire for ordering relationships



that holds individual fulfilment in balance with mutual social, natural, and environmental flourishing. My well-being is inextricably related to yours and the nature which surrounds us. This underscores the need to consider mutual benefits in society, rather than presuming that zero-sum approaches are the norm. If one considers mutual benefits, the public realm is capable of accommodating legitimate moral differences, while articulating the pursuit of a life that is in accordance with 2 -1.5 futures.. This can be enhanced if mutual flourishing is considered in specific contexts and accounts, and fed by a dialogue about the pursuit of such a good life. A focus on shared interests and common practices, rather than on divisive values, becomes crucial,

both on society as in climate policy.

In terms of politics, this version of a good life likewise may result in an unexpected mix up of otherwise unrelated aspects of the conservative, socialist or radical, and liberal political traditions, and opportunities for novel alliances between them. In right-of-centre conservative terms, this approach highlights the importance of a long-term covenant across generations, a recognition of the bonds of family and friends, the biological facts of our own selves and nature, and how the constraints of law, custom and faith and our mutual obligations both limit our autonomy, but are also sources of stable communities, relational meaning and dignity. In



a left-of-centre socialist sense, it highlights the importance of community, of the places people inhabit; the relationality of rights and the various bundles that form any given set of (property) rights, the inevitability of a shared fate by all groups in society, and the importance of focusing rather than ignoring the lower levels of income and least advantaged members of society and politics. In a liberal sense, it underlines the importance of the liberal as an adjective, and not solely as a noun – a source of impartiality and generosity, while at the same time, a reminder of the importance of the rule of law, property, and of an economy that can operate freely, unburdened by increased big business monopoly and state power.

Shifting to policy and climate terms, these politics do not change the need for radical mitigation and the associated adaptation and capacity building. However, it does imply a change in the scope of sources for these actions, which is now much wider than government and (big) business. Rather than relying mostly on central government entities, this approach is much more aligned with a more decentralised, bottom up approach. Visions of genuinely desirable futures must serve as a guide to organised groups, larger segments of the population and policy makers to imagine good ways of life, with the necessary emissions and climate impact profiles. These visions function as a new kind of political imagination; one consisting of realistic ideals and



socially embedded practices and virtues that may help inform collective action and policy. Guiding questions will not only be: will this or that course of action result in less carbon, better adaptation or increased capacity? But instead: is this or that policy conducive to the flourishing of the flock in a 2 – 1.5 world? As stated, ‘solutions’ will not appear as impositions, but as a search for opportunities.

In the conversation about a policy focus, Harald Winkler argued this search for a good life implied a preferential option for the poor. In the subsequent conversation, this preference was not taken to be an abandoning of the urge to pursue the true, the good and the beautiful, but instead as a continuation of this pursuit. If you look for the beauty of things you will bring it forward it; if life gives one a favela, painting it might help not only make it more beautiful, but also improve the relations in its community, help enhance our resilience, and allow to search for more flourishing. In this vein, a development might not only be functional, but beautifully made; a new town, not only include the larger number of houses, but appealing ones, where people want to live. An example of favelas painted in bright colours in Lima, just before attending the meeting; the work of the build better commission led by the late Roger Scruton, the Poundbury development in Cornwall, and the epidemic of millions of abandoned social service houses in Mexico were all mentioned. It was argued that including beauty had improved a sense of well-being amongst inhabitants.

These alliances may imply preserving key aspects of the liberal understanding- not only the rule of law and contract but also macroeconomic and price stability, which benefit most citizens. Of the 9-17% of global GDP required to allow for a transition to a net zero target, this approach may see this amount as coming from the overall economy, rather than from any part of the public budget, which is a much more viable option, including structures that tap into contributions from future generations—to the extent that they will benefit from this transformation as well.

Moreover, in addressing climate policy, the wider focus allows for novel combinations. Luis Miguel Galindo and Jose Garibaldi argued that if one considers the focus on an improved life and social agency in the new development paradigm, this also allows a role of new political coalitions to deliver policies that benefit larger groups of the population. As it emerged in conversations, the amounts that lower income segments of the population spend on food, transport, and energy is much larger than richer segments. Novel coalitions to deliver better public services in transport, food, and health, and a rewarding cultural life, might in turn release disposable income otherwise spent in covering these areas. A richer cultural life, more active interaction with nature and society, and a more convivial environment might improve the quality of life without increasing emissions. Likewise, similar coalitions might help local governments and communities to better spend resources on low carbon adaptation, targeting resources for adaptation to climate impacts at local level. As Pabst described it: ‘A system of participation, a system that will be able to do things that central governments cannot. Where the local level has the knowledge’.

These desires could well be accompanied with the pursuits of other aspects, which in turn might help them to bear fruit in a communal setting. This would imply an increased emphasis on how the urban and built environment highlights the possibility for increased conviviality and relationality in society, and how infrastructure might likewise help this to come forwards. Likewise, a desire and support for enhanced nature based solutions, linked to ecosystem based adaptation, would help to improve linkages between communities and natural systems. Increased relationality in socio-economic systems would also imply a discouragement of monopolies and monopsonies, and a cracking down on increased capital concentration arising from them.

This may also be accompanied by a kind of ‘corporatism at the low level, rather than corporatism at a



high level'. The sort of good will that existed at the start of the pandemic when trade unions, business and government got together and talked to avoid mass unemployment. As Pabst put it 'we want to allow for institutions that help preserve good will at a low, local level'. At a local level, this might include a renewed corporatism that includes the presence of businesses, unions and local agents to examine how best to reduce emissions while at the same time improve quality of life. This would allow us to consider both how to constrain large sources of emissions, how to better assign resources to adapt and control impacts in specific





places, and how to improve life there. The aim is not to be anti-international, but rather aim towards international cooperation that would strive to engage the lower possible levels of the political hierarchy before moving anywhere higher.

The advantage of this approach includes the fact that this could enhance in people their agency to own and develop things, rather than denying their agency by making these options nationalised or privatised. Further examples included an uber in energy, allowing one to buy and sell energy (if you can own it), Guilds being more present in the economy as entities that are non-state market actors with higher aspirations, direct land ownership to allow families to grow their own food or ‘embedded economies grounded in social ties so that they do not tend towards monopolies’ as Pabst put it.

Next Steps.

The creation of something new, such as this dialogue, engenders its own rules; the beginning of something provides the characteristics that serve as the initiative’s own guiding principles. This creative dialogue process likewise seeks to follow such emerging guidance.

In this light, several conceptual, entrepreneurial and academic and practical lines were mentioned towards the end of the conversation, with the aim to continue this dialogue. Some suggestions were related to this process itself; others went beyond it. In all cases, there was an interest in maintaining coherence with a search for roots and places, for continuing aligning good desires with practices, and for searching for an associated teleology oriented towards the good, excellent and beautiful within society and communities. Likewise, there was an interest in linking the results of this conversation to the policy environment, on the one side, and the wider project circumstance, particularly by exchanging views with country teams, and outside the project, in various contexts.

Initially, the idea was to transcribe the conversations, prepare a summary of them, and circulate this summary, initially within this dialogue, but then within the country teams of the project; and subsequently, in a different format and in a wider fashion, outside of the project. Besides this transcription and dissemination, there was also the intent to start coding the results of the conversation, and compare these coded results with findings and results from those arising from the country teams, and other parts of the project. In this task, participants of the dialogue offered help in both refining the coding, as well as identifying areas where there is a “family resemblance” across themes, in the words of John Milbank, where the overlaps and relations might be explored further.

It was also argued that the means to facilitate further dissemination and cooperation may include two groups of initiatives: the production of more regular material on one group, as well as the production of books or similar, on the other. The first group included the development of a podcast, where participants may present and discuss their own views. Other options in this group included the creation of an online sub-stack, where various dialogue participants may write periodically on specific themes once a month, thus providing a steady stream of texts and insights to further develop these views; or of the management of a twitter account to disseminate advances. Likewise, the creation of a course on post liberal approaches to climate change, with dialogue participants. The second group will include the production of at least an edited book, where participants may further develop their contributions to this dialogue. Initial contacts for this initial book have already been advanced.



Additional suggestions, included exploring how examples of local action, in communities, societies, and groups were working. Funding sources and fund-raising initiatives in climate and the humanities were also proposed by participants, and will be followed through 2022 - 2023. An institute that would explore further the role of teleology and post liberal orders was also proposed.

The dialogue will continue by working on further refining the summary findings first, including in a meeting with other project participants to be advanced in the Autumn of 2022, by subsequent remote consultations afterwards, and by organising a similar meeting in Craiganour in the Spring of 2023. A calendar with the initiatives will be prepared by the Autumn of 2022. The sense of promise in this development is shared by all participants, as is a shared sense of the need to contribute to it. The shared enthusiasm and hope participants witnessed first-hand while in Craiganour, we trust will help guide this effort further and flourish, as an example itself of what a good life is.

One of the main takeaways from the discussions in Craiganour was the need to rethink conventional approaches to contemporary problems. If we are aiming for a new politics going beyond technocratic liberalism, we would need to start conversations. We would want to society to be filled with people possessing virtues that our current educational institutions very rarely put together: technical mastery and practical wisdom aiming at a good life. To attempt to bring about such a thing, we founded the Good life Policy Institute.



A Summary of The Institute

'Adam Smith is wrong in saying that there is only self-interest between butcher and baker. Look out at the beauty we see off these widows, we are sitting in the middle of a common good, and we can only enjoy it because it is something that we have in common... Friendship, communion they are a huge part of the experience that we are all undergoing and the joy that we feel in being here, and that is why the ancients put them at the heart of politics, at the heart of all human life'

J. Milbank

'Instead of apocalyptic narratives we need positive visions of beauty; positive visions that will encourage a pursuit, an adventure, a hunt for beauty, an attempt to bring this beautiful vision about'

A. Milbank.

Craiganour, Scotland, May 30th - June 1st, 2022

The search for a politics of community, requires citizens who can find that which is common and orientated towards the good. How can we lead a good life in a world consistent with a 1.5-2 degree rise in temperature?

The solution is not fully socialist as it does not want the State to remove agency, nor is it fully market based as increasing the wealth and power of an influential party is not part of the good life. Instead this approach wants to focus on the common good (not the greater good) and orientate ourselves towards that.

It wants a good life to be the aim and the technical knowledge of economics, policy etc. to serve that goal. This requires a practical sagacity on how to live a good life, merged with a technical mastery of how to make our institutions point at such a thing. It merges classical wisdom on relationality and teleological flourishing with modern expertise. It calls for not just experts nor for starry eyed idealists, it requires someone who is both. Who can understand the problems of our time from the bottom to the very top, from the roots to the branches, which is rare in policy conversations.

The Institute wants to change this. It wants to create different conversations, with a different philosophical base apart from the materialist, nihilist base of the enlightenment (a premise which our left v right, liberal v conservative debates all share). It aims to create a new generation to have a different approach to policy,





climate, economics and the pursuit of the good. This new expert will be as sharp as an economist yet as well rounded as a citizen.

To do so, the institute will offer lectures with experts in areas of policy, climate philosophy etc. as well as extended symposiums of food and drink to digest the ideas. It will offer opportunities to partake in the Energeia network Scotland meetings and opportunities to partake in the partner's offshoots.

The institute will focus on a different way of solving collective action problems. It will aim for an economy that is desirable as well as sustainable: with an urban planning focused on living well, with walkable cities, public transport and other approaches to be discovered. Likewise, it will avoid the environmentalism that says 'this is the pill and you must take it'. Instead it wants to inspire visions of a beautiful life, whose attraction can be what brings it about (not the sheer power of the state nor the wishful benevolence of the market).

This requires a generation inspired to think differently. To have the imagination to conjure up a more beautiful existence in a politics not founded in power relations but real relations. It requires the courage of a soldier, fighting for the vision of a poet with the dogged practicality of a motorcycle mechanic, with the weapons of modern political economy.

The institute is a continuation of the Learning By Doing project. It wants to learn by questioning. It wants to imagine what a society where virtue is enshrined at every level of the political society (from the ground up) would look like and it wants to create the grounds to do so.

