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Eco-Catastrophe, Arithmetic Patriotism, and the Thatcherite Promise of Nature

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Abstract

This paper describes how the renovated 1970s liberalism that would become a major thread of Thatcherism grew on the back of public perceptions of crisis, and adapted worries about ecology to worries about ‘financial ecology’, or money supply. The natural conditions of money movement have a particular place in the British constitution as the original basis of authority for the 1688 state, when Newtonian ideas of eternal laws of physics were ‘financialised’ by John Locke. In this thinking, the property basis of citizenship itself is nature, and must be underwired by universal terms of exchange following natural rules. Although Thatcherism has often been described as an alien credo, it was largely enabled by this promise of a return to a financial natural law. In the terms borrowed from Luc Boltanski by William Davies, it returns to a ‘political physics’ which now takes on a moral role preventing catastrophe, or an ‘economic patriotism’ seen to protect the constitution from political force. The ’70s return to Locke’s understanding of nature builds on and repurposes visions of the catastrophic in popular culture, fiction, children’s books, and TV, and which I describe here. It begins with those eco-catastrophes that describe a ‘disaster of nature’ and seeing them as also disaster of the property-producing role of labour, in the ‘despotic’ role of trade unions, and the perceived threat to money as a universal measure, a disaster that would increasingly be given an arithmetic measure in inflation. For key liberal or neo-Lockean think-tanks of the mid-’70s, the attack on natural law by despotic power, measured in inflation, could be seen as a mass erosion of individual responsibility, as dystopian and as always calling for a restoration of the balances of nature. The result is a permanent and quotidian vigilance over threats to nature that sees their solution, paradoxically, as the creation of more property. Understanding this binding between nature and property in the constitution that gave rise to Anglophone capitalist modernity also helps give a fix on the way stories of ecological disaster can, as Frederick Buell has described, themselves be given values and repurposed for increased consumption.

This paper makes two related arguments. Firstly, that one influential thread of 1970s liberalism, a thread crucial to the growth of neoliberalism and to Thatcherite policy, was less a foreign imposition than it was a return to a thinking rooted in the founding conditions of British state. Secondly and relatedly, this thread built on existing images of a crisis of nature, which it addressed, apparently paradoxically, by expanding the possibilities for property-creation. Commentators on neoliberalism have sometimes noted a ‘convergence of

crisis' in the proliferation of anxious competition during this era – but they have less often noted the extent to which catastrophic depictions of the threats of organised labour and inflation were used to argue for a liberal *restoration*, and a demand for a return of natural law. For this peculiarly 'ecological' revision of Hanoverian assumptions, the progressive movement of resources into individual hands is the work of nature, nature must be vigorously defended against politics, and politics is a source of crisis. This thinking would become highly influential at the heart of Thatcherism, but it was also already at the heart of the constitution that anchored Anglophone capitalist modernity. From the 1970s it aimed to read imbalances of nature as an imperative to *increase* the progressive individuation of property – something as in Frederic Buell's description of how ecological crises can themselves be used to proliferate market values and regenerate capitalism.¹ As I will suggest in this run through some popular catastrophic visions of the mid-'70s and the reactions to them, the Thatcherite Restoration needed to narrate *crises of nature* as *crises of property value* and of the sound money that measures it, and as something to be solved by stripping away the infecting politics, in an attitude I have called 'arithmetic patriotism'. Some of the most incisive commentaries on neoliberalism have described something like an arithmetic patriotism – as in William Davies's adaptation of Luc Boltanski to describe neoliberalism's 'political physics', its reduction of politics to the laws of the economy.² The extra move suggested in my reading of circulating images of catastrophe is in the idea of a restoration to a state form *built on* such an arithmetic, conceived as the default condition before any political attempts to codify it, and as having to resist all codification and political interference thereafter – an environment, or a living in accord with the laws of the universe.

Thatcherism as Restoration and Natural Law

British-left accounts have sometimes tended to assume that the rise of neoliberalism from the mid-1970s was something alien and European. This is problematic since it misses the extent to which it was pressed by a return to an understanding of nature foundational to the British state, in particular the claims for to universalism in the Hanoverian Restoration and the 'Financial Revolution' at the end of the seventeenth century and turn of the eighteenth. Certainly regime-changing, the Hanoverian Restoration, like, in large part the later Thatcherite Restoration, is characterised by a specific form of revolution, one that inheres only in a stronger return to a natural or pre-existing condition. This is not just the familiar point that the state protects private property, it is that the state is *constituted in* the claim that the individuation of property is the work of nature. Although the constitution that arises from this, for obvious reasons, can never be limited by codifying it, foundational claims to natural law are strongly made by that great rationale for the 1688 state, John Locke's *Second Treatise on Government* (1689). For Locke, the universal physical laws that should underwrite government were also those of the new Newtonian cosmology, and these underwrite the natural progressive movement of property from feudal blocs to individuals, 'the great and chief end ... of men's ... putting themselves under government'.³ Individual property is created by the addition of labour to nature – or, conversely, nature is what is not yet property – and the individuation of property is a universal law of progress.⁴ For Locke, and for the adaptors of Locke who would help clear the way for Thatcherism, the

return to the law of nature is always more a *restoration* than it is a revolution. It is not so much a repetition of the original as it is a tightening of an idea of the original, a more forceful or even military re-statement that the original principles are organic and universal and resist any ‘political’ limitation – thus the anti-republican defence of the uncodified constitution that was the moral glue for the new expanded state throughout the eighteenth century. The authority of Anglophone modernity then is very substantially built on the protection of natural law from ‘despotic’ force – it is, as it would be put by that most canonical constitutional commentator, A. V. Dicey, above the merely ‘political considerations’ that determine European constitutions.⁵ And of course since such an authority always needs ‘more nature’, it is always imperial – there cannot be, in any serious sense, an unwritten British constitution apart from empire. Such a vision of nature as the constitutional fix for property-creation suggests an important gloss on Jason Moore’s influential description of capitalism as a way of organising nature: for this constitutional fix, nature itself is the enclosure of individual property – property is, apparently paradoxically, an ecological imperative.⁶

Such an ‘ecological’ return to individual property, and the universal measurement of sound money needed to back it, is particularly readable in those neo-Lockean thinkers who congregated in London in the 1970s to help guide Britain away from the political catastrophes of the late industrial era. The territorial decline of empire had by now suggested that physical nature had reached a productive limit (the reliance on land and resource extraction for property-creation had begun to breach the ‘Lockean proviso’ – there must always be more nature left over for the creation of new property).⁷ The conversion of new property, and therefore individual responsibility and the rule of law, would now be seen as depending on finding new realms of nature. Thus Britain’s particularly patriotic take on the post-industrial (or subjective) economy, its embrace of the perpetual conversion of history to heritage, and the move towards audit, valuation, and the modification of subjectivity itself (the turn to ‘identity’, as we now know it), movements that can be understood as a repurposing of the Lockean demand to extend the realm of nature.

This step up to the subjective economy was helped by identifying threats to a way of life to an economic ecology that demanded the aggressive restatement, or restoration, of natural law. F.A. Hayek in particular stressed that the political ideas of collective ownership that had come with the industrial compression of workers were always threatening to eclipse individual responsibility, with catastrophic consequences. And for mid-’70s liberals in the vein of Hayek, the coming political catastrophe had been caused by the incursion of collectives into the principles of individual property that for the British constitution were the basis of the rule of law, an understanding that placed Hayek’s own *The Road to Serfdom* (1944) alongside George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) in a new canon of foundational collectivist dystopias.⁸ Collectivism was always despotic and anti-progressive, and recalled the power blocs supposed to have been eclipsed by the Lockean ecological stress on mass individual ownership – collectivist threats to nature were

medievaesque, feudal in their loyalty to groups that blocked the natural evolution towards personal choice. This imagery was particularly trained on trade unions, collectivist bodies that attenuated individual property and made unsupportable claims on sound money as a measurement of the health of an environment. Trade union power could now be seen as part of a catastrophic impact of industry – understood both in terms of its atmospheric emissions or effects on an external environment, and in an equally environmental pollution of the natural role of labour, supposed to create personal responsibility by producing individual property. The interplay of these two understandings of pollution – the environmental of the atmosphere, land, and seas, and the environmental of mass individual property, was important for the coming cleansing of collectivism from labour, and helps to explain Thatcherism’s uncanny resonance with the boom in ecological disaster-writing it immediately followed, and from whose dark visions it drew.

Eco-catastrophes and Diseases of Labour

This has not much been appreciated of the ideas feeding into the Thatcherite Restoration and into early neoliberalism – the extent to which its critique of industrial collectives drew from the wave of eco-catastrophe peaking between the mid-’60s and mid-’70s, and which was often concerned to quantify the damage caused by industrial modernity, in emissions, food supply corruption, species extinctions, or overpopulation. The early ’70s adaptation of ecological worries that might seem to demand a new collective responsibility often turned rather on a diseased and unnatural socialism. Early ’70s British eco-catastrophes generally tended to trigger anti-socialist, self-sufficiency, or ‘neo-tribalist’ responses – in pressure groups like the PEOPLE Party (1972-, from ’75 the Ecology Party, and only later shifting leftwards as the Green Party), in the scientific responses to the ills of mass society seen for example in the wide-ranging BBC series *Doomwatch* (1970-72), in the middle-class survivalist movement, and in ‘organicist’ and largely right-wing eco-catastrophic pamphleteers and publishers including, perhaps most influentially, Edward Goldsmith’s *Ecologist* magazine (1970-2009).

Straddling arithmetic descriptions of how the feedback effects of pollution worsen exponentially – how they are always already catastrophic – and descriptions of industrial collectives’ erosion of individual irresponsibility, *The Ecologist* helped popularise a vocabulary of disease amongst anti-communists and market fundamentalists in the radical regions of the Conservative Party or on its paramilitary fringes. As early as 1970, the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) officer and anti-communist activist Brian Crozier described workers’ ownership as a ‘toxin’, and more familiarly by the mid-’70s, the feudal pressures of trade unions was widely known as a ‘British disease’.⁹ The environmental castigation of industry was also a financial cleansing, and made post-industrial asset stripping peculiarly wholesome: Peter Walker, for example, who solicited the opinions of *The Ecologist* while Secretary of State for the Environment in 1972, was influenced by the notorious asset stripper Jim Slater, a Goldsmith confidant who would himself become a post-’79 government insider.¹⁰ Such was the power of the ecological understanding of the economy that by

the end of the twelve-year war with miners' unions in 1985, Margaret Thatcher felt able to shift from her previous description of environmentalists as 'enemies within' to stress the environmentalist credentials of a post-coal world – a position she could only arrive at through a long castigation of collective labour as itself polluting.¹¹ Increasingly advisors encouraged a thematics of unions as disease-carrying, including the author of *Enemies of Society* (1977), Paul Johnson.¹² This stress on post-industrial cleanliness allowed the new liberals to pick up on the much wider consideration of the catastrophic limits of industrial modernity rising in *The Ecologist* and related environmental campaigns and visible by the mid-'70s in various popular catastrophe narratives. In the BBC TV series *Survivors* (1975-77), a pandemic – by now not even requiring detailed explanation – decimates humanity and breaks survivors into tribes much like those Goldsmith had advocated in an *Ecologist* article of November 1973 as 'small labour-intensive units both in agriculture and industry'.¹³ The new tribalism strongly connotes Lockean liberalism in terms of the movement of power from collectives to individuals and families (and frequently in *The Ecologist*, to ethnicities), and in *Survivors* as elsewhere this is made to clash with the 'feudal' pressures of trade union leaders – the pressures of, as Alwyn Turner puts it in his catastrophe-tinged history of the 1970s, those 'union barons' who go on trying to exert control even in *Survivors*'s post-pandemic environment.¹⁴

To an extent this shift concerns the perceived unsustainability of the welfare state in the face of a decadent collectivism that was forgetting the imperative of individual property. It also however suggests a generational forgetting of the mass defence of the British organic in the emergency of World War Two, an emergency that from this point neo-Lockean liberals would frequently seek to recreate. If the population were to forget the mass defence of the organic society, the organic vision of Humphrey Jennings and the expanding BBC, its role against a European politics which stood in contrast, they could also forget respect for the natural role of property, and so the rule of law. Without strengthened moral guidance in a restoration, the generational distance from the war could itself be catastrophic. This helps explain why threats of ecological disaster, communism, and even the pressure on money in inflation, amidst the boom of catastrophe narratives in the years 1974-76, were often put into the hands of children, and why children themselves become unfamiliar, otherworldly, even pestilent. Pop culture enthusiastically registered this figure of amoral and ungovernable child, the product of misguided egalitarian comprehensive schools and the kinds of housing estate described by *The Ecologist* as child abuse, and in *Doomwatch* as triggering dehumanisation and feudal gangs.¹⁵ The BBC adaptation of Peter Dickinson's *Weathermonger* children's fiction trilogy (1968-70) as *The Changes* (1975) is symptomatic in leaving children to deal with a sudden inexplicable mass phobia of technology that leaves a young protagonist joining trails of refugees on city streets.¹⁶ In Doris Lessing's *The Memoirs of a Survivor* (1974), the inexplicable and oddly timeless collapse of civilization is imaged by the gangs of children living on the pavement, themselves to be eclipsed by a new generation of animal-like infants who have no language and hunt in packs.¹⁷ Such images of kids as feral and amoral suggest a shift from the associations of youth culture with '50s affluence that still characterised whiggish histories of post-war consensus. Feral kids have less in common with the teddy boys seeming to

signal the end of rationing than they do the murderous youth of Derek Jarman's punk autopsy *Jubilee* (1978), whose own journey through body-strewn streets leads them to the power base of a 'feudal' media mogul.¹⁸ Feral children are not just a nuisance, they are an environmental issue – and they overlap with that other agent of disease often placed immediately prior to the Thatcherite Restoration, the rat. At the turn of the decade eco-catastrophists had already worried about mutant rats resulting from polluted food chains, but rats were now also widely perceived as a medieval shadow on industrial modernity, in imaginings from *Doomwatch*'s 'Tomorrow, the Rat' (1970) to James Herbert's pop horror *The Rats* (1974) (in which the defence against vermin is conducted from a Churchillian map room) – and also widely came to stand for the prehistory of the Thatcher administration – *Ratcatcher* (1999, set in 1973), *The Iron Lady* (2011, partly set in 1979).¹⁹ The escalation of a crisis of pollution and parasitism in these more or less anthropomorphic forms, rats and kids, demanded a new and more strident reassertion of the Lockean-Hanoverian conception of nature, based in personal property and sound money.

This reassertion was keen to pick up on any existing hints that pressures on sound money were entangled with pressures on the physical environment. W.M.S. Russell in Goldsmith's *Can Britain Survive?* (1971), for example, describes how the pressure on money in inflation and the pressure on the environment in industrial pollution were part of the same attack on nature – the result of a rise of communist politics over a Churchillian willingness to pull together.²⁰ This kind of connection would appear particularly compelling after 1973 as the effects of the Oil Shock seemed exacerbated by miners' unions' wage demands following their victory of the previous year. The attack was being undertaken by a medievaesque unprogressive politics, particularly by *union barons*, despotic figures blocking the evolution of modern individual enfranchisement, and now often explicitly associated with an existential threat to the Hanoverian state, as described in the Labour revisionist Stephen Haseler's account *The Crisis of British Democracy* (1976), for which the battle against despotic trade union power was really a re-run of the battle for parliament at the end of the seventeenth century.²¹ Or for Thatcher speechwriter and anti-communist Robert Moss in 1975, the *de facto* expansion of trade union authority meant that Britain had already 'strayed a long way down that road that ends in the [anti-Hanoverian] Levellers' Republic'.²²

But perhaps the most thorough denunciation of union 'feudalism' is *The New Barons* (1975) by *The Economist* labour correspondent Stephen Milligan. Citing a January 1974 poll reporting that 55% of people felt that trade unions had too much power (though tellingly, only 2% thought that workers had too much power), Milligan describes the catastrophic implications of the closed shop (compulsory union membership).²³ The closed shop's impact on the natural laws of money and their role in personal responsibility would be spun into speculative fiction by Anthony Burgess's *1985* (1978), whose non-union protagonist is ruined by unemployment and inflation and left to wander the streets amongst feral kids who resent their own comprehensive education.²⁴ In Milligan similarly, the closed shop points towards a near-

future ‘ungovernable Britain’ with a perpetual minority government – a fear after both 1974 elections, and something associated in British constitutional thinking with weakness – a Scottish Republican Army thrives in ‘nationalist’ and ‘Marxist’ wings, private armies roam the country, students control campuses and teachers schools, there is little functioning transport, powerful militias run Glasgow and Liverpool, and the CBI is pressing for a right-wing coup.²⁵ Milligan follows the eco-catastrophic vision of union power and *The Ecologist’s* stress on ‘systems feedback’ to show that the malignant element introduced into natural balances creates a vicious circle – in this case, strikes’ successes encourage moderates to become militant, which in turn makes more strikes inevitable. And the pressure this exerts on universal standards of value means that for Milligan since the mid-’60s unions have been *agents* of collapse – they have caused a shift from *cost-push* inflation to *demand-pull* inflation, they have subjected the Newtonian movement of money to unnatural force.²⁶

For neo-Lockeans it was important to narrate this pressure on the natural flows of money as political. Inflation had forces behind it that were as political as were the threats to Britain’s uncodified constitution made by Europeans from French revolutionaries to Nazis, and now and as a matter of urgency, by the Soviet Union, held to have a direct stake in the inflationary destruction of British natural law. In *The Collapse of Democracy* (1975), Moss describes how the unions’ pressure on money was a direct Soviet gain, leading to the ‘instability that “Boris Ponomarev, the head of the international department of the central committee of the Soviet Communist Party (CPSU), described early in 1974 as “a qualitative shift in the crisis of capitalism” which has opened up “new possibilities” for revolutionary change’ (Moss 1977: 60). Union barons’ KGB links were the subject of widespread speculation – perhaps most iconically, Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) General Secretary Jack Jones, named in a 1977 Gallup Poll as the most powerful person in Britain.²⁷ Milligan lists amongst communist agents of collapse six of 39 TGWU executives, and Haseler 10 of 39 TGWU executives, 12 of 52 on the AUEM National Committee, and six of 24 on the NUM executive.²⁸ Haseler catastrophises the Labour NEC’s platform-sharing with East German communists, and its acceptance of TUC resolutions to strengthen KGB links after an address by former head Aleksandr Shelepin, and the scrapping of the proscribed list in 1973 is often described as leaving senior Labour Party managers unable to stop the slide from the organic authority of parliamentary responsibility to an inflationary communism.²⁹ The external political pressure on money is also a pressure on parliamentary Labour, understood by Haseler as an expression of a native sense of fairness within an evolutionary firmament now undermined by an alien Marxism.³⁰ Haseler’s own dystopian sketch sees TUC demands developing into a ‘totalitarianism’ misguidedly appeased by a naive establishment in a spirit of war-like solidarity, but refusing the likely requirements of a coming IMF bailout, to create a feedback loop of demands echoing the feedback pollution effects behind the eco-catastrophe.³¹

For neo-Lockean liberals then, the contagions of value had to be described as an actual emergency. The defence of the organic and the natural had to become the rationale for a new military (or semi-paramilitary) mobilisation on the part of the state – something that may seem strange next to Thatcherite rhetoric of ‘rolling back the state’, but is quite predictable if the state is understood as *constituted in* property creation. In the face of the apparent political emergency there were frequent calls for a deployment of armed forces. Amidst rising rumours of communist takeover Heathrow Airport was occupied for periods of 1974, which Tony Benn speculated was ‘to get people used to tanks and armed patrols on the streets of London’.³² Restorationist groups often cited money collapse as evidence of an actual war with communists, in the tone of the National Association for Freedom (NAFF), founded in 1975 by army strategist and banker John Gouriet to coincide with the publication of Moss’s *The Collapse of Democracy*, and supported openly by Thatcher from around January 1977. Gouriet was clear that Soviet invasion was linked to the collectivist threat to the natural motion of money – ‘I began to see more and more that the Soviets viewed this country as an offshore aircraft carrier... The sledgehammer, as far as this country was concerned, was the Trade Union movement’.³³ Or in the pestilent terms of Walter Walker of Civil Assistance and until 1972 chief of NATO’s northern forces ‘in charge of rehearsing doomsday scenarios’, ‘[t]he communist Trojan horse is in our midst with its fellow-travellers wriggling their maggoty way inside its belly’.³⁴ Or for SAS founder David Stirling’s ‘organisation of apprehensive patriots’ Great Britain 75, partially funded by James Goldsmith (brother of Edward, tycoon power-broker, and founder of the Referendum Party), since the conflict over ways of life was now as bad as ‘the worst period of the last World War’, the defence of parliament ‘cannot possibly be resolved within parliament alone’.³⁵ The case for crypto-paramilitary defence of natural law was increasingly represented in Thatcher’s shadow cabinet and cabinet and wider advisory circles, in figures including Nicholas Ridley – author of the 1974 Report on readiness for the decisive battle against unions – John Biggs-Davison, Norman Tebbit, Robert Moss, Robert Conquest, and Airey Neave, organiser of Thatcher’s campaign for the ’79 election, talismanic symbol for resistance to Nazis, and someone ‘who was talking of organising an “army of resistance” to fight a Labour government... [and] of assassinating Tony Benn should he become Prime Minister’.³⁶

And yet in good Lockean tone, since constitutional authority is based in nature, the remilitarisation to protect it was not itself to be seen as violent – but only as a defence against violence. The mid-’70s then see a significant revival of the whiggish, Hanoverian imagery of British Empire as the birthright of a ‘quiet people’. Moss describes the British’s ‘docile character... which, since the seventeenth century, had not been given to smashing up political institutions and lopping off the heads of kings’ – with the implication, of course, that the quiet people had to be shaken into seeing political despotism in their midst, as they had in 1688.³⁷ Often seen as wanting to end the post-war consensus, Thatcher was in fact skilled at mobilising the mass morale of the wartime and post-war emergency in a defence of natural law.³⁸ Campaigns against union despotism were frequently described in Churchillian terms, as in Thatcher’s own experience of the Christmas 1973 power cut – ‘[t]here was a touch of wartime spirit about it all. The businessmen were of one

mind: “Stand up to them. Fight it out. See this off. We can’t go on like this. It was all very heartening”.³⁹ The mythscape of wartime morale re-established here would remain key for the anxious defences of the economy through the neoliberal era, through Gordon Brown’s repeated references to the Blitz during the 2007-08 banking crisis, and the entanglement of Keep Calm ’40s retro imagery and the many other forms of nation-branding unusually central to Britain’s economy.⁴⁰ A common contemporary touchstone for restoration after a violent contagion of value was Chile. Moss’s *Chile’s Marxist Experiment* (1973) pointedly links inflation to the coup against Allende’s regime, seen as unavoidable and as restoring a natural financial condition and advised by the mostly Chicago-based neoliberals who would turn their attention to the UK and the money-union-energy crisis at the start of the 1974.⁴¹ The spread of paramilitary restoration thinking was encouraged by Frank Kitson’s influential study *Low Intensity Operations* (1971), describing how since defence now largely meant counter-subversion, military power should expand into value protection – a shift also seen in the Conservative Party’s 1973 pamphlet *In Defence of Peace*.⁴² From the mid-decade, a burgeoning spy fiction industry (*Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* in 1974) began to merge with domestic thrillers in which Kitsonian alliances of intelligence and Special Branch foil crazed communists and entryists – restoration dramas in which pestilence is staved off by increased and militarised vigilance.⁴³

Moreover since the environmental threat ultimately attacks property – and therefore individual responsibility – the restoration it demands is undertaken on behalf of the households of the property-owning, property-creating class, which must be bolstered and protected from the imminent collapse – the ‘middle-class extinction’ described by William Rees-Mogg as a ‘terrible disaster’.⁴⁴ For Patrick Hutber in *Decline and Fall of the Middle Class* (1976), the erosion of money leaves the anchoring class of our ‘profoundly bourgeois nation’ in a position where they are ‘doomed to a gradual extinction over the next generation or two’.⁴⁵ And although now usually read in terms of ‘national identities’, Tom Nairn’s *The Break-up of Britain* (1977) similarly diagnoses the difficulties of Britain’s non-revolutionary middle class as part of a wider struggle to protect early-established position, unusually deeply embedded in the institutions of state.⁴⁶ The defence of the middle-class family from collectivism effectively ‘suburbanises’ *The Ecologist*’s neo-tribalism, and gives rise to a ‘self-sufficiency’ movement sometimes seen as emblematic of the fears of the mid-decade as a whole.⁴⁷ The usual mnemonic for this movement in popular histories is *The Good Life*, a 1975-78 BBC comedy series typically remembered for a kind of folksy resilience, but in fact increasingly explicit about the Goods’ neighbours’ defence of natural property rights against town-hall ‘commissars’, ‘Maoist’ council art teachers, and socialist officialdom in general. Margot (Penelope Keith) and to an extent her husband Jerry (Paul Eddington, later a Tory MP in freemarket activists Antony Jay and Jonathan Lynn’s *Yes, Minister* (1980-84)) are likely footsoldiers in the restoration. As Margot puts it herself, her takeover of the local music society is not a revolution, it is a ‘right-wing coup’.⁴⁸

Crucially, these political pressures on natural value are by now readily quantifiable in the form of inflation, and so are drawn back onto an arithmetic ground. For restorationists inflation becomes the index of environmental damage done to property and to the rule of law. Inflation then is both a marker of disease and the possibility of its arithmetic cure. In the last *The Good Life*, a 1978 Royal Command performance with the queen in attendance, Margot answers the Goods' anxiety about their retirement plans by describing her own counter-inflationary pension strategies in the language of pestilence now familiar from the neo-Lockean pressure groups like Civil Assistance – 'There is a maggot in English society and its name is socialism. I do not intend to suffer from it'.⁴⁹ The dual sense of *good life* as a middle-class return to nature and as a restoration of value had already been touched on in that most explicitly neo-tribal story of collapse, *Survivors*, in which the visionary leader Charles describes how he is well suited to post-pandemic survival since he was once a participant in self-sufficiency movements and 'devoted to the good life'.⁵⁰ And homely and 'organic' connotations of this term would persist throughout neoliberalism, re-emerging in the 2015 Conservative General Election campaign, where the term not only picked up on a mood of nostalgia for middle-class prosperity, but also gestured towards the communist trade union disasters and eco-catastrophes to which the good life was a response, and which could always return after a Labour victory.⁵¹ The turn to a 'good life' was to an avoidance of social and environmental diseases, and a demand for restoration of eternal laws to money.

Inflation Disasters and Arithmetic Patriotism

It is not simply that the middle class must be kept secure. For the social stability of the Lockean constitution, especially in a Hayekian understanding of market dynamism as a protection from the political, the middle class must also perpetually expand, always breaking up feudal or collective blocs, confirming the natural movement of resources towards individuals. For a Conservative shadow cabinet influenced by neo-Lockean thought, this suggested a necessary shift in emphasis from the political negotiations over wages with the government to policy based on the primacy of money supply, one that echoed the 'recoinage' of 1696 pressed by Locke.⁵² If this turn seemed 'innovative', it was also in fact a return to constitutional fundamentals – or as Thatcher's biographer Charles Moore puts it, '[t]he idea that it was the government's job to control the supply of money in the economy and the employers' job to settle wages with employees... seemed simultaneously too radical to understand and too old-fashioned to countenance'.⁵³ The 'proper control of the money supply' became a theme of the influential 1976 policy statement, *The Right Approach*, and 'common sense' appeals to natural law were increasingly presented as conciliatory rather than as political or contestatory, especially as the Labour Party seemed unable to prevent the effects of the strikes of 1978-79, even after the mini-recovery following the IMF bailout. The Conservative Party Political Broadcast of 17 Jan 1979 saw a 'threat to our whole way of life' that demanded not political contest but an appeal to a 'common nationhood, and even of common humanity'.⁵⁴ Such an appeal moreover could be made to dovetail with the existing Keynesian ideas on money supply, and within the think-tanks to which many influential Conservatives had turned, there arose a monetarist tradition of 'Keynes versus the

Keynesians', a rehabilitation of the Keynes who in the *General Theory* wanted to complete Locke's work on money quantity.⁵⁵ The restoration of natural laws to money supply itself became a stated aim of policy, driven by what Moore describes as Thatcher's 'moral hatred of inflation' – policy documents between 1975 and 1978 frequently described the enemy not as trade unionists, of whom she reckoned around a third were Tory voters, but as inflation itself, now seen as a disease.⁵⁶

This is not to claim that neo-Lockeans invented the imagescape of pestilent inflation. In some form, the inflation catastrophe has existed in popular culture at least since the money expansion of 1970-71. In the speculative-dystopian, and uncannily Kitsonian, LWT TV series *The Guardians* (1971), an incidental radio news backing sets the scene for the current police state by explaining that in the '70s all had been well, apart from inflation.⁵⁷ By the time of a likely IMF bailout in July 1976, the BBC's *Money Programme* was extrapolating various possible post-sterling futures much in the tone of Moss.⁵⁸ And in Jarman's *Jubilee* (1978), the punk historian Amyl Nitrate sits among the ruins with a Winston Churchill mug that will soon be broken, and hollowly echoes the lighthearted togetherness of the post-war consensus in the new warlike condition – 'Life in England these days is inflationary, but we're carrying on regardless'.⁵⁹ (On the wall behind Amyl a newspaper headline reads 'Healey's Budget Strategy in Ruins', probably referring to the 1976 budget, seen as giving the TUC a virtual veto over wage policy). Like the other forms of eco-catastrophe, catastrophic inflation was even passed into the hands of child protagonists. John Rowe Townsend's children's novel *Noah's Castle* (1975) for example, in which a son watches his ex-army father try to protect the family from the coming hyperinflation by hoarding goods (an accusation that Thatcher herself had recently felt the need to head off during the Conservative leadership campaign in December '74, by showing her larder to the press).⁶⁰ When sterling is abandoned to leave the child protagonists with choices of theft and prostitution, the story turns to an extraordinary extended consideration of property and citizenship, with redistribution militants Share Now splintering from the existing organisation Share Alike, in a struggle that closely resembles contemporary descriptions of the Labour Party's defence against communist infiltration.⁶¹ Neo-Lockeans do not create this broad popular attention to inflation catastrophe – but they did link a patriotic fight against inflation to the survival of the Hanoverian state and the natural law at its heart. The chapter that opens Moss's *The Collapse of Democracy*, 'Letter from London, 1985' (repeating a 'Year After Orwell' motif common in neo-Lockean catastrophe writing taking in Burgess's fiction and Rhodes Boyson's collection, both called *1985*) connects current struggle to the 'hard-fought victory of capitalism over medievalism in the period between 1500 and 1700', and depicts a coming of (post-Hanoverian) feudal violence that will follow the final collapse of sterling.⁶²

Consistently after the emergency of January '74, inflation as environmental threat makes appearances in Conservative Party documents. For the February 1974 General Election Manifesto, since 1970 'and never more so than today, the gravest threat to our national well-being has been the menace of unrestrained

inflation'.⁶³ But the connection of eco-catastrophic inflation to the arithmetic patriotism needed to answer it would largely be undertaken on the fringes of the party, addressed by think tanks keen to renew liberalism through the appeal to nature, and drawing followers away from the in-house Conservative Research Department, particularly Antony Fisher and Ralph Seldon's Anglo-Hayekian Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA) and Keith Joseph's Centre for Policy Studies (CPS). As early as 1973, Graham Hutton's introduction to a Hayek IEA paper had recalled Hayek's castigation of political systems' interference in the natural laws of money.⁶⁴ If Hayek's description of political dangers seems peculiarly UK-attuned, we should remember that the Lockean solution of restoring money supply and therefore individual responsibility had to work together with a new British constitutional fundamentalism – in the British case fiscal hygiene was *patriotic*. The description of the 'horrors of currency collapse' in Hayek's 'Choice in Currency' (1976) is almost exactly that of the catastrophist writers arguing for something like a Hanoverian restoration – Moss, Rees-Mogg, and Burgess.⁶⁵ Hayek himself transmitted the significance of the Hanoverian resistance to misguided political attempts at social justice, and confirmed that the recovery of a universalism of rules was the only legitimate reason for the use of force – '[f]or Locke... it was [the law's] character of general rules of just conduct equally applicable to all which justified their coercive application'.⁶⁶ The threat to property is confirmed as an ecological threat to, as he says quoting Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 'the great, the immense fabric of human society, that fabric which to raise and support seems in this world... to have been the peculiar and darling case of Nature'.⁶⁷ For this patriotism of universal or arithmetic rules, government is merely a ground for the arbitration of individual claims, for which clean or faithfully universal money value is needed, and without which there is no personal choice and no rule of law. This is corroborated by a 1977 IEA pamphlet by Lionel Robbins, founder member of the Mont Pelerin Society and the figure responsible for bringing Hayek to the LSE. Robbins describes the 'equivalence' of market actors as 'a *condition* of any behaviour capable of being placed in a moral category' – and if this equivalence before the market cannot be guaranteed, moral action disappears altogether.⁶⁸ Moss is clear that this equivalence of market actors is not only natural, it can also be described in Newtonian terms – it is 'a body of rules that are discovered, not invented, from precedent and convention'.⁶⁹ And elsewhere, strikingly calling Newton's tenure as Keeper of the Mint, Moss explains how those who threaten property are guilty of a crime against nature, which is 'the greatest crime of which a man is capable'.⁷⁰ The spectre of threats to an ecology of exchange in sound money then sets up an anxious imperative to convert (political) claims for *equality* to a natural basis of *equal opportunities*, a paradoxically anti-egalitarian vision of equality that finds solutions to catastrophe in an arithmetic fundamentalism.

The behaviour that led to inflation then can be seen from the perspective of the coming arithmetic restoration, as what William Rees-Mogg described in his important 1974 tract *The Reigning Error* as a capitulation to *inordinacy*, or an erosion of eternal laws by the gratification of present desires – or spending – so that inflation becomes a numerical index for a wide range of decadent behaviours including sexual promiscuity and drug addiction.⁷¹ Rees-Mogg understands inflation as a catastrophe periodically visited on

the natural world requiring counter-action, something to be seen in the same way as ‘any of the plagues which affect mankind’ – and the image of a ‘monetary disease’ would remain popular amongst Thatcher’s economic advisors, particularly Keith Joseph).⁷² The dramatisation of inflation as decadent, violent, and pestilent assumed (as in Hayek) that politicians, unlike businesspeople, were bound to miss, or pretend to miss, the way the immediate political benefits of printing money were always followed by an inevitable collapse after a gap (the ‘Hume-Jevons time lag’). A tendency to get swept up by unnatural political desires could lead to catastrophes like the one that has always stood as a cautionary tale for Whigs, the French Revolution, whose pressure on sterling, Rees-Mogg tells is, left Britain open to ‘ruin and revolution’.⁷³ Or for Moss, updating the European political threat to the Churchillian defence that now seemed to be waning, the rise of Hitler was down to inflationary chaos.⁷⁴ Thatcher advisor Alan Walters also described currency devaluation as corrosive of actual sovereignty (the case made by Burgess’s 1985, in which much of London has been bought by Arabs), made ‘apocalyptic predictions’ about inflation in summer ’74, and rebuked Joseph for slacking in discipline towards the money supply.⁷⁵ Or as Friedman says more generally but in more explicitly neo-Lockean tone in his inflation-catastrophe sketch of 1976, since Britain’s coming ‘hyper-inflation or radical change’ would threaten individual property and therefore individual choice, it would also make all value judgment impossible.⁷⁶ Since inflation erodes individual choice it also erodes morality, and consequently points towards a society without ethics, a society whose trajectory is always catastrophic. A moral society, on the contrary, and after Locke, works outwards from individual choice based on individual ownership, so that a solution to the loss of responsibility that threatens chaos has to be found in the expansion of property-creation to new (subjective) realms – the limitations of physical nature and industry have made property-conversion *psychological*, they demand a turn to ‘human nature’ in the continuous modification of the self as market-ready (or the neoliberal roots of ‘identity politics’). The protection of nature then, as serene as the associations of that word might be, depend on the kind of constant anxious mass-psychological adaptation that William Davies, following Giorgio Agamben, has described as a ‘state of market exception’.⁷⁷ And the constant possibility of a catastrophic collapse of property demands a countervailing constant patriotic identification with market fundamentalism – a patriotism perhaps misread by those accounts of neoliberalism without an ear open to the Lockean tone of the restoration (David Harvey’s for instance), for which British nationalism seems a kind of unintended consequence and a contraindication for marketisation.⁷⁸

The suggestion here has been that patriotic descriptions of money value from the ’70s, with their associated terminology of discipline and eventually ‘austerity’, were also weirdly ‘environmentalist’, in a way that we might want to bear in mind whenever descriptions of natural catastrophe seem to be reabsorbed into a demand for more market solutions. The arithmetic turn looks much like Edward Goldsmith’s ecological conception of *cybernetics*, described in a running column in *The Ecologist*, and aiming to map environmental interactions by giving numerical values to the effects of feedback on other parts of the system. In the middle of the decade the ecological ‘feedback’ depiction of the battle against environmental

damage was turned to labour- and money-pollution. John Hosykns and Norman Strauss's influential CPS battleplan document *Stepping Stones* (1977) was drafted, much as had the ecologists, as a flow chart that attempted to quantify the feedback turning the 'healthy society' into the 'sick society' (with blame tending to flow back to trade union pressure).⁷⁹ Indeed even more candidly in *Stepping Stones*, one of the characteristics of the sick society is that it 'rejects simple arithmetic'.⁸⁰ The anxious embrace of an arithmetic language of audit, measurement, and proliferating market values that we associate with neoliberalism also had a lot to do with this *return*, this confirmation of an apolitical and uncodifiable nature at the state's core – or what the canonical Victorian constitutionalist Walter Bagehot described as the British constitution's 'efficient secret'. The turn to the audit economy in this sense is not merely an imposition from outside, it is a confirmation of an existing definition of the natural, and it is to be embraced as the natural.

This also helps explain why more recent threats to the natural authority of the constitution have so often been answered by attempting to reduce them to arithmetic. The Scottish independence referendum of 2014: for example, during the reporting of the referendum it became something of a standing joke that the Strathclyde University analyst John Curtice was so often relied on BBC commentary – not because Curtice's analysis was inept, but because its method was to reduce political questions to measures of 'voting behaviour', even when the constitutional question being asked was pointedly reaching beyond such an arithmetic. 2014 also made apparent, however, the extent to which British parliament had embraced the Hayekian modification of Locke that says that an increase of market anxiety always also means an increase in political stability into new and unthought of realms. The Newtonian 'dynamic yet static' understanding of a society, only stable when it is expanding the basis of individual property, is now used in an everyday sense to turn the anxious defence of inequality into a patriotic performance of inclusion. Or as numerous Labour spokespersons described in 2014, political movements like Scottish independence represent a 'danger' for public services, even if they aim to keep education and healthcare free to access: public services' defence of market values can now, paradoxically and disturbingly, be played as inclusive, protective, even counter-catastrophic. What the political has to contend with here is the reach of values which, as Thatcher said of monetarism on in strikingly Newtonian terms, represent a natural arithmetic 'as fundamental as the law of gravity, and you cannot avoid it'.⁸¹

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⁴ Locke, *Two Treatises on Government*, pp285-302.

⁵ A. V. Dicey, *England's Case Against Home Rule*, Richmond, Surrey, Richmond Publishing, 1886; Dicey, *An Introduction to the Law of the Constitution*, London, Macmillan, 1979 (1885), p127, p135; Davies, *The Limits of Neoliberalism*, p47.

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⁸ Graham Hutton, Preface to F.A. Hayek, 'Economic Freedom and Representative Government', London: Institute of Economic Affairs, 1973, p4.

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