

LAND & LIBERTY

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Ecology and the Long Run

LORD KEYNES was asked, "If your theories work for the short run, what of the long run?" He replied, "In the long run we are all dead." To which answer has been made, "The long run is shorter than you think." We are indeed perilously close to the long run, and some of us would like to live a little longer.

Ecologically speaking, the long run is what counts. Ecology is the science that deals with the relation of living things to their environment, and its students warn that man is not getting good grades in this subject.

There was the kindly minister who pitied the poor lobster because it didn't have a "sense of its situation." But the lobster knows all it needs to know in order to survive. Would that as much could be said of man whose future is in doubt. True some lobsters are caught and boiled—but that is not their fault. Man is threatened by the prospect of stewing in the mess he himself is making.

Ecology tells us that the way of nature is to create a balanced environment, with the various forms of plant and animal life contributing to the maintenance of an organic, self-sufficient whole.

Man—who is capable of higher and lower deeds than the animals—has demonstrated his skill in making superior use of his natural environment. He has also frequently disrupted the natural cycle to the detriment of other living creatures, of the environment, and eventually of man himself. His marvellous industry and technology have befouled the air and besmirched

the waters; his war games, with atomic testing, experiments with deadly gasses, and actual warfare, have done damage beyond what is yet known; and his greed has trampled on nature's bounty without giving back what little she asks.

Yet man does realise that a harmonious whole is needed, for he is seeking to create a complete miniature ecological system in the space vehicles he sends forth. Why can't he seek as much for his home planet?

Nature's striving for organic balance may be seen in the structure of life itself. Hydrogen, oxygen, nitrogen and carbon form the bases of life. Silicon, though more available than carbon and though able to form molecules with other elements, does not provide as suitable a basis for life as carbon. The reason is that silicon keeps forming molecules with an open end, thus continually leading to the creation of the same kind of molecules. In the formation of rock, it can only form more rock. Carbon, on the other hand, creates closed bonds with other elements, thus permitting the molecules more freedom and ability to build up higher and more complex forms.

We may derive a clue from nature's design here not only as to man and his environment, but also as to man and his social structure. For the social system has to be in balance as well as the natural environment. An economic cycle has to be developed whereby inputs and outputs are in balance, free units are able to move freely, and a *quid pro quo* arrangement is worked out.

Our economic system has failed to do this. Monopolies and unearned incomes which allow more to be taken out than put in, throw the system out of balance. Keynesian remedies have not restored a balance but have merely added the rapacity of government to the rapacity of private privilege.

Our present system of deficit financing and of taxing labour and capital resembles the silicon formation which always leaves an open end asking for more and never knowing when to stop. It does not ever lead to harmony, balance and fulfilment. It leads, rather, to the petrification of society.

Compare this system with the proposal to use the rent of land as the source of public revenue. At once, an organic system would be created. A definite and identifiable source of revenue, a fund created by society, would be returned to society. Individuals would thereupon be left free to reap the reward of their own industry without having to worry about how much will be taxed away. Freed from the encroachments of government and monopoly, society could attain to higher levels. It is even conceivable that such a system, by encouraging the better use of land, would help toward the restoration of the natural environment which is now threatened by man's depre-

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dations.

Perhaps when Keynes waved away the long run, he intuitively perceived that his proposals did not stand up to the ecological test. It is foreseeable that if we do not learn more about applying ecological and economic balances, we *shall* all be dead.

The long run has a way of catching up; and nature has a way of demanding payment, not forgetting her long-term loans. "You may throw nature out with a pitchfork, she will always come, running back." We have thrown out nature with pollution and deficit financing. It will be interesting to see what kind of return visit she will pay us.

—R.C.