# 12 propositions for a new social covenant

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# Introduction

## 1. ‘The purpose of politics is to create the conditions for virtue’

- ‘We’ precedes ‘I’: society forms the individual
- We are our best when we exercise the virtues: the ‘excellences of the species’
- To nurture the virtues politics should strengthen the family, the community and the nation

It would help to know who we are, or at least where we come from, and where we are going. Modern liberal culture has an answer to these questions. Before ‘we’ came ‘I’. ‘I’ exist as an independent and autonomous being. I have an ‘authentic self’, the ‘real me’, which is sacred. Society - ‘we’ - is made up of similar autonomous beings, who have agreed to abide by common rules that protect my authentic self, and yours. If we get those rules right (it’s a work in progress, and people differ on whether we need more rules or fewer) everyone can be themselves, and live in harmony.

Thus modern liberal culture proceeds from the idea of the singular, unrelated, indeterminate individual and aims at a perfect, rationally-ordered human society. But both these ideas are fictions. John Rawls imagined a man standing behind a ‘veil of ignorance’ and designing the society he is to live in. Unable to see what position he would have in it, said Rawls, he would design a society that is fair to everyone, and especially to the worst-off. But the ignorant, relationless man is not a man at all; he is a machine, or an animal. It is the process of experience, of socialisation into the habits and attitudes of a community, that makes us human. To design a good society, a person would need to have lived in one.

The liberal idea is a perversion of the Christian one. For in Christian doctrine, as in Rawls’ scheme, individuals did indeed step forward fully formed, into Eden. And there is a vision of a fair, well-ordered society in the future, whether in this life or the next, in which the worst-off become the most significant: ‘the last shall be first’. The crucial difference is that the Christian story includes the Fall. The individual, the ‘real me’, is broken, and only a good society can partly (and only partly) restore it, by making me its member.

‘We’ precedes ‘I’. This crucial conservative belief is the source of an alternative idea about who we are, where we come from and where we are going. The individual did not emerge fully-formed out of nowhere, and then sign a contract with society. He or she is both the product of society and its producer, the heir and testator from one generation to the next of an evolving inheritance. There is not a perfect ‘real me’, independent of the circumstances that made me; nor am I my own creation, entitled to ‘be myself’ whatever I believe that is.

Rather, in the words of John Milbank, ‘there is an objectively right way to be human’. This challenging principle is at the heart of things. The universal, objective, ‘right way to be human’ is to be virtuous.

‘Virtue’ is a potent term. It is not the same as ‘good’ (bravery is a virtue: Cromwell was a ‘brave bad man’, said Clarendon). The virtues are the things that human beings are good at doing, ‘the excellences of the species’ in Edward Skidelsky’s words, ‘as strength is to the lion, or speed to the horse.’ They include bravery, imagination, compassion, loyalty, the quest spirit and the homing instinct, and a host of old-fashioned qualities: fortitude and charity, temperance and continence, prudence, shrewdness, forgiveness and faith.

We are at our happiest and best when we have the opportunity to exercise the virtues. We want to live well. This means more than a passive sense of well-being. It includes well-doing, the practice of ‘excellences’ like friendship, creativity, and overcoming. And the practice of the virtues does not just make us personally happier, it makes life better for everyone else.

Given this, the purpose of politics becomes clear. It is to create the conditions for virtue: to strengthen the circumstances in which people can most successfully develop the habits and instincts of good conduct.

What are these circumstances? They are human associations, moral communities which instil the virtues by necessity and instruction. Associations make us happy and safe. They also make us free, for liberty is founded in the trust that forms among people who know each other. And the essential associations - which make the structure for what follows in this series - are the nation, the community and the family.

The relations of individuals, and the state, to each other and to these essential associations is the proper business of politics. This is not the social contract of liberal theory, the transaction by

which the autonomous individual joins society, as he might take out a gym membership, on his own terms and for his own interests. It is, in the word explained by Jonathan Sacks, a covenant: an implicit mutual commitment, extending backwards and forwards in history, to sustain our common life and pursue the common good together. I call it the ‘social covenant’.

This old idea is right for the new world we are entering, but it needs updating and re-presenting. The trends of the times are towards nations, communities and families. We are re-learning the old truth that we need each other, and that the emotional tug of home can rival the call of global markets. Technology is part of this. To take an important example, the internet is making places abandoned by the 20th century economy - industrial towns, coastal communities, villages - viable once again.

And yet tech could destroy the social covenant quickly and completely. Ethic-less, unsituated, inhuman, it is the agent of the narcissist and the tyrant. It could enable most absolute individualism and the most absolute statism.

A ‘new social covenant’ is needed. This will enable a new settlement between individuals, the associations of family, community and nation, and the state; and between the state and other states. It will agree the ethics that must regulate the new powers of data and digital, and the other expressions of this miraculous age from genomics to the supervision of space. It will manage the constitutional transition we are in, towards a better distribution of powers. And it will help us describe our goal as a nation, part of Western civilization - to tell the right story about the journey we are on.

The posts that follow are my effort to describe the new social covenant that I think we need. Eleven further propositions follow, grouped under the three headings of Nation, Community and Family. Each group ends with a proposition about a legal order: a new constitutional settlement to strengthen the nation; a new principle - to be enshrined in law - of ‘community power’ to strengthen communities; and a new commitment to the existing legal institution at the heart of family life, namely marriage.

# Nation

## 2. ‘The state should safeguard the customs of the country’

- Nations enable liberty
- Elite disdain for the nation threatens the social covenant
- Government should nudge our institutions towards patriotism

Brexit was a revolt against the pan-national idea. Yet the EU was not the real target of the Leave voter. The enemy was the British establishment which had surrendered its role as the champion of the British people, in favour of a leading but ultimately subservient role at the court of pan-nationalism. David Goodhart tells the story of sitting at an Oxford college dinner between the head of the British civil service and the head of the British Broadcasting Corporation, and hearing them agree that their responsibilities were not to the British people but to the world at large. The suspicion that this was exactly the sort of thing that bigwigs said to each other over dinner was the principal reason for the Brexit vote.

The culture of elite estrangement from the patriotism of ordinary people is a paradox. Our elite is overwhelmingly liberal, in the terms expressed in the introductory post, and ‘progressive’, in the sense of leaning in to modernity. And liberalism and progressivism were, traditionally, allies of nationalism. In throwing off pan-national control, of empires and polyglot European dynasties, people united around common languages and common geographies. The Reformation emboldened the rulers of territories to break the chains with Rome and the Holy Roman Empire: Luther’s ideas, as Herbert Butterfield said, ‘chimed with the ambitions of princes’. But in time nationalism chimed with the ambitions of liberals and progressives. Dr Johnson’s expostulation, ‘patriotism is the last refuge of the scoundrel’, came from a Tory perspective: to be a ‘patriot’ in the 18th century was to oppose the Crown and the Church in favour of ‘the people’. In the next century, the national idea - the kinship of language and geography, charged with a sense of modernisation and even equality - overwhelmed Europe’s petty principalities and delivered Italian and German unification. In England the Tories came to embrace patriotism too, and with their allies, the well-named ‘Liberal Imperialists’, articulated an idea of empire that, under the Union Jack, spread the light of liberty and progress to the dark places of the earth.

The 20th century saw a correction within liberalism. The danger of ‘the nation’ as a cry for scoundrels, whether princes or populists, was obvious. Liberal Imperialism came to be seen as a horrible contradiction in terms. And indeed the threat of the demagogue, whipping up national feeling against elites, or immigrants, or foreign opponents, is an essential argument for the rule of law and an independent civil society.

Yet it is only by accepting ‘the nation’ as the object of loyalty that we can maintain those things. Only with the sense that we all belong to a common community can we persuade people to submit to the rule of law, and to respect the fragile yet ego-inhibiting institutions of civil society.

Nations are the largest political units that command popular legitimacy, and are therefore the essential condition for liberty. They represent an agreement among many people, over a large area, to trust each other, and therefore to tolerate both personal freedom and cultural diversity. This toleration is only possible because of the prior, broader agreement, never ratified but a fact of life, that makes the nation coherent. It is because the people are patriots that they resist the appeal of demagogues; the nation is not afraid of the state, nor wants to be. Orwell wondered why the British Army had never adopted the goose-step, and answered himself: ‘because the people in the street would laugh’.

The great threat to liberty is elite estrangement, the supercilious disdain for patriotism by leading public servants, academics, and the lobbyists who gain airtime in our public debates. And so, if we are to defend liberty, we need to be more robust in insisting on the implicit deal that is the basis of their privileges.

The social covenant safeguards liberty by hedging it about with approvals and disapprovals that, within the broad parameters of free speech, ensure the public conversation reflects the customs of the country. The trend within academia to systematically denigrate our country’s history and heroes is an abuse of the social covenant. So are religious teachings that do not just exhort believers to live apart from mainstream society but to live in active enmity towards it. So is the new politics of race, sex and gender that has adapted the economic analysis of Marxism (based on class) to the cultural sphere (based on ‘identity’), pitting groups against groups and almost everyone against the institutions of the country.

Of course, these breaches are in the sphere of civil society, where the state should fear to tread. The independence of universities has been a primary cause of their, and Britain's, greatness from medieval times till now. So is our tradition of religious freedom, and the right of business and civil society to manage their own interaction with the public, even to the point of cultural Marxism.

Nevertheless, government would be right to nudge elite culture in a more popular and patriotic direction. It has immense cultural assets of its own, from the power to lay on public festivals and celebrations to the conditions it attaches to grants of public money. It is the principal funder of civil society.

Our democracy and our liberal norms depend on the sense that 'the system' respects 'the people'. This is not to insist on a uniformity of culture, still less to build up the British state as a cultural bully insisting on the old ways only. 'The people' are a diverse bunch and indeed our past, let alone our present, has many streams, currents and counter-currents.

It is necessary to modernise our patriotic presentation and assure that the public culture reflects back the realities of modern Britain. I set out in later posts (Propositions 3 and 9) the principle that local communities need far more power. This should include more power over their public spaces and statues, albeit tempered by the principle that the social covenant extends back in time as well as forwards: the current generation cannot entirely disinherit its ancestors.

## 3. ‘We need a leaner, more capable state, and greater security in food, energy and tech’

- Whitehall should focus on the big strategic things, not the management of local human services
- We face multiple opportunities and challenges, including existential threats; these are the proper business of government
- We should build our resilience in the essentials of food and energy, and develop ‘tech sovereignty’

In the previous post (Proposition 2) I argued that government should defend and promote the customs of the country. This is in order to build trust among citizens, so enabling liberty and supporting the associations of civil society that stimulate virtue.

For the most part this promotion will be done through culture policy, and by devolving power and responsibility to local places (Proposition 9). Yet there is a role for the state that goes beyond supporting social customs and civil society. It has work to do itself.

Until the mid 20th century the British government really was ‘Whitehall’, the short street that runs from Parliament Square to Trafalgar Square. The Treasury, the Foreign Office, the Ministry of Defence and the Cabinet Office all still occupy their imposing mansions there. But in recent decades what we call ‘Whitehall’ has spread all over Westminster. Vast modern buildings house the Home Office and the departments of Education, Health, Business, Welfare, Justice and Housing.

This great expansion cannot be said to have made the British state more efficient, or the country more resilient. The pandemic has cruelly exposed the failings of our public systems adequately to prepare for or manage a large-scale domestic crisis. We are naturally concerned with the rightness and wrongness of ministers’ decisions and with the heroism of front-line staff in the public sector. Yet in between headquarters and the trenches, and of more practical significance than either, is the apparat. This is where our triumphs and disasters in the last twelve months can be traced to. The triumphs include the smooth and uncontentious (and so hardly reported) enrolling of millions of new welfare claimants, and the successful delivery of the vaccination

programme. But we have also seen multiple mishaps in the procurement of PPE, and the shameful treatment of the old and the young in care homes and schools.

The state is good at big, simple, strategic things. It is particularly good at working with individual citizens, whether that means issuing universal benefit entitlements or organising the distribution of a vaccine. It struggles with human complexity and with human sociability. Yet this is what a great deal of government work - particularly the responsibilities of 'outer Whitehall' in the modern buildings - is now concerned with.

Growing up, learning, staying or getting healthy, getting or keeping a job, getting or keeping a home, looking after a family and coping with adversity (including the extreme adversities of homelessness, serious mental illness, addiction, or crime and punishment) - these are the tasks of human life. They are usually bound up with other people, often the people closest to you. Government has a role to play in each of them, particularly through funding and regulating professional services in each field. Where government struggles is on the demand side, when the demand side is not just a faceless benefit claimant, or an anonymous arm held out for a jab. Humans require more than the provision of services, delivered to them as equal individual units. They need other human beings to help, exhort, or educate them. They need kindness and flexibility and, where necessary, tough love. Most of all, humans need the virtues.

Kindness, flexibility, love and virtue are not best organised from Whitehall. I describe below (Proposition 8) a different model for public services. If this were followed government could do without 'outer Whitehall'. The taxpayer would realise billions in asset sales and savings on staff. More importantly, government would be free to do what only government can.

In addition to its cultural role supporting the customs of the country, the state's job is to prepare the nation for the long-term threats and opportunities it faces. The opportunities are manifold: longer, healthier, more fulfilled lives; a fairer society; a cleaner environment. The threats are extreme, however.

We would do well, without panicking about them, to recognise the existential dangers that face our country and the world, from lethal pandemics that attack the healthy and mutate faster than our vaccines; to war in some hideous modern form; to catastrophic technological collapse; to the effects of a tipping point in climate change, such as the melting of the permafrost over the Arctic

tundra leading to vast releases of methane. None of these events is especially likely, and some could perhaps be contained if they did occur. But the apocalypse has a whole troop of horsemen now, and it is the responsibility of governments to anticipate and prepare for them.

I address policy on climate change and foreign policy in the next post (Proposition 4). Domestically, government should reform Whitehall to better foresee and respond to sudden threats, with vastly improved capabilities at the centre of 'inner Whitehall'.

In addition to planning and executing crisis responses, the state needs greater strategic capacity, to take the long-term investment decisions that will make our country safer and more prosperous in the generations to come.

One appropriate strategy, both for our long-term prosperity and our response to crises, is to increase our security in the essentials: food, energy, and technology. Long world-wide supply chains for food are precarious in an age of global disruption, harm the environment and discourage farmers from growing high-quality produce for the local market. Reliance on imported electricity made from fossil fuels by repressive regimes puts us at risk of blackout in the event of global conflict, dirties the planet and props up despots. And the hegemony of the US, and increasingly China, and of vast American and Chinese corporations in the new industries of data, digital, microprocessing and data storage threatens a terrible new dependence. If we are not careful we will wake to find ourselves citizens of some bleak new empire of tech, headquartered in California, in Shenzhen or in cyberspace.

Our departure from the EU's Common Agricultural Policy and Customs Union mean that we are now free to strengthen our domestic food production, local food processing and local retail. The UK already leads the world in some alternative energy technologies and we have the natural assets - not least a lot of wind and water - to free us from dependence on foreign oil and gas. We need a similar determination to assert 'tech sovereignty': resilience against hostile penetration of our critical national infrastructure, and the development of a genuinely UK-based tech sector (rather than just performing an R&D function for other countries and mega-corps).

Tech sovereignty need not empower the state at the expense of citizens. As I argued earlier (Proposition 2), nationalism must support not suppress liberty. We should explore options for

community data ownership, and develop a form of digital habeas corpus that protects the rights of individuals to their own data.

Nor is this call for ‘sovereignty’ a call for autarky. The sea around these islands ‘serves in the office of a wall’, as Shakespeare said, but it is also the highway to the world’s markets. In food, energy and tech we will continue to trade with other counties, and our new freedom from the EU enables more and better global trade than ever before.

Sovereignty cannot, must not mean isolation, or indeed independence in any but the most formal sense. A nation no less than an individual has its being as a member of a wider community of similar units, similarly independent in form and entwined in fact. This is relationship. The structures of the relationship of nations are of course mutable, and specific to different functions. We need different collaborations on trade, defence, space, the regulation of the internet or the response to climate change. In all these areas it is possible for nations to pool their resources and agree to collective action without diminishing their sovereignty.

## 4. ‘We need environmental nationalism: a deal between Left and Right to save the planet and reduce mass migration into Europe’

- Environmentalism is unpopular because it echoes the globalist, anti-national agenda
- Climate change should be addressed as a security challenge to the nation state
- We need an assertive foreign policy, with more spending on defence, development and diplomacy

I have argued in earlier posts that nations enable liberty by creating trust among citizens (Proposition 2) and that we need a leaner, more capable state to meet the domestic challenges of this new age (Proposition 3).

Nations also enable a more benevolent and effective foreign policy. I listed the catastrophic threats the world faces, ‘from lethal pandemics that attack the healthy and mutate faster than our vaccines; to war in some hideous modern form; to catastrophic technological collapse; to the effects of a tipping point in climate change, such as the melting of the permafrost over the Arctic tundra leading to vast releases of methane.’ Many of these threats require greater national resilience, including improved capabilities in Whitehall and more sovereignty in essentials like food, energy and tech. But they also demand action beyond our borders, and in concert with others.

Acting in concert with others does not require nations to subsume themselves in multilateral organisations, meta-states like the EU or the UN. On the contrary, they urgently require independent nation states - for only nation states have the popular legitimacy that is needed for the steps that need to be taken.

Climate change is the cardinal example here. Why do conservatives, and particularly working-class voters, distrust environmentalists so much? Partly it is because the green agenda challenges the doctrine of economic liberty. It involves a lot of petty prohibitions, long-term targets, and picking industrial winners. In this it resembles so many failed efforts by socialists to direct the economy. It assumes an infallible wisdom about what is happening in the world, and about how to change it. The costs of these changes fall on other people, people very different

from the lobbyists and academics who push for them: the costs fall on entrepreneurs, the wealth- and job-creators, and on low-income people who want affordable petrol and warm homes.

The green lobbyists don't seem to care about those people, and prefer to focus on the plight of others living on the far side of the world. And here we see why working-class voters generally reject environmentalism. The problem is not the socialism so much as the globalism.

As Anatol Lieven has pointed out, discussions of climate change are dominated by people on the international left who generally favour open borders and multilateralism. Yet it is precisely these positions - inviting more immigration and diluting the sovereignty of nations in pan-national groups - that makes the environmentalists' cause unpopular and therefore impossible.

Instead of pan-nationalism, the green movement needs more nationalism. This doesn't mean isolation. The UK already leads the developed world in measures to reduce our impact on the planet, with a legally-binding commitment to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050. Yet the UK emits just 1% of the world's carbon. Our real contribution to the prevention of climate change will come through the influence we can exert on other countries. We need to help expedite the transformation of the big emitters - the US, India and China above all - through diplomatic and trade policy and through spreading the gains of our own world-leading green energy sector.

But even more important than global partnerships is our own strategy abroad. This should be explicitly to reduce the threats posed by climate change to the security of the UK.

The fact of man-made climate change is no longer in question among scientists, although its extent, our capacity to affect it, and the costs of action are properly the subject of political dispute. It does appear mankind is in trouble, however. In Paris in 2016, world leaders at the '21st Conference of the Parties' (COP21) agreed to measures that on the most hopeful scientific predictions will limit the rise in global temperature to a little over 3 degrees by 2100. Even this modest rise would raise sea levels by six metres, drowning the world's coastal cities.

Clearly we need to decarbonise the world's economy as quickly as we can, consistent with the livelihoods of the population. This won't be easy. To meet the UK's own target of net zero by 2050, we need to reduce our emissions by 11 per cent a year. The last year has seen the virtual

shut-down of large parts of the economy, with offices closed and greatly reduced travel by car and plane. Emissions fell by only eight per cent over this period.

Net zero need not be as painful as this implies. We don't need to close the economy. We need to replace our energy sources with cleaner ones, and insulate our buildings against energy loss. But we do need to take action, at home and abroad, that will cost money and effort; and action abroad that could cost the lives of British soldiers. We need to do this because climate change is not just a moral crisis - an imperative for all humankind to address - but a security threat for the UK.

The relation of climate change and security is not observed enough. Yet the most obvious effect of the sort of catastrophic rises in sea levels predicted at COP21 is enormous political instability. Conservative predictions cited by Lieven suggest that on current trends 50 million Africans could be displaced by 2050. Refugees will place impossible strains on weak African states, with greater likelihood of war and terrorism, including in the West. Many refugees will head north. There is a real prospect that western Europe will be overwhelmed by a migration crisis in the coming decades that dwarfs in volume the number of refugees arriving from the Middle East in recent years.

This, not the plight of polar bears or indeed the plight of fishing communities in the global South, is the case for action on climate change. And this is the deal that the political Right in the UK needs to strike with the political Left. Climate change must be tackled primarily as a security challenge. The Right will help save the planet if the Left will help save the nation.

'Environmental nationalism' starts very close to home. We need a major investment in border security, and in the Royal Navy in particular. Just as the navy once disrupted slave traders off West Africa now they must disrupt the trade in trafficked migrants across the Mediterranean and the English Channel - natural borders which must be reinforced with rigour and without handwringing.

And beyond the borders of Britain and Europe, we need a muscular foreign policy that assertively supports good government in the developing world, and proactively engages where bad government enables terrorism and security threats to seed and germinate. We need to lay the ghost of the British Empire not by withdrawing from Africa but by acting in partnership with

democratic governments there and with other Western nations to mitigate the effects of climate change and its associated disruption.

We could do worse than start with the old Empire, now the Commonwealth, and strengthen our commitment to the security and prosperity of Anglophone Africa. The UK can offer a better deal to those countries than the ‘debt servitude’, a modern form of colonialism, imposed by China. To this end we need a properly resourced and properly unified defence, development, diplomatic and trade strategy.

This won’t be cheap. Targets of 0.7% of GDP for development and 2% for defence (our commitments to the UN and to NATO respectively) will almost certainly be inadequate. Before increasing them we need to make sure we spend current development and defence budgets, both notoriously wasteful, better than we have in the past. But increases must come.

In addition to these expensive commitments, we have some hugely valuable assets whose deployment is negligibly cheap, including our arts and sports, our legal system, our universities and our science base. We are good at multilateralism, and could play a useful role in framing the world’s approaches to the new issues of internet regulation, the ethics of AI or the management of space.

## 5. ‘We need a new constitutional settlement that includes the recognition of England within the Union’

- The Union is unstable because England is a political non-entity
- A new constitutional settlement that recognises England could attract the support of people across the UK

In the three posts above I have argued that the state should promote the customs of the country, that it should develop greater capability and focus on national resilience at home, and that it should adopt an assertive foreign, defence and development policy to reduce conflict abroad, especially by reducing climate change and its effects.

The arguments for nationalism - as a bond of trust that enables liberty, as a means of good government at home and of effective action abroad - are arguments for the Union of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Each of these benefits acquire strength and scale from the historic union of people across four countries. It is indeed a union unique in history for its success.

But these are also arguments for the break-up of the Union, for they could just as well be applied to the individual countries within it. I have argued that the trends of the time are towards family, community and nation. The same spirit that took the UK out of the EU could yet take Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland out of the UK.

For all its success, the history of our 300 year-old experiment shows that the UK could never subsume its component parts, and become a single nation of its own. Each member is proudly discrete, and confers a distinct identity on its citizens. And yet it is too simple to say that everyone has a primary loyalty to their nation, and that some have a secondary loyalty to the UK - or that the Union is simply a contract between nations without direct popular allegiance of its own, such as the European Union might be described. In Northern Ireland, the Union has the direct allegiance of more than half the population. In Great Britain the nationality ‘British’ is in some parts more popular than ‘English’, ‘Welsh’ or ‘Scottish’.

Sovereignty in the UK is a tangled web. Wales was never sovereign in the sense of formal independence and self-determination over the whole territory; there was never (except perhaps for a few years in the 11th century) a Welsh state distinct from England, and the country entered

the UK as a principality of the English crown. Scotland, however, did so as a kingdom of its own, by an act of its own Parliament which thereby dissolved itself into the one at Westminster. The six counties of Northern Ireland are, historically by necessity and since the Belfast Good Friday Agreement by treaty with the Irish Republic, self-determining - part of the UK by popular consent, and only so long as that consent lasts.

Since devolution in 1998, these formal facts of sovereignty sit uncomfortably within the Union - partly since England, the fourth nation, has no devolved powers. This is the great anomaly. England is one the oldest nations on earth: as Robert Tombs shows, there has been a coherent 'England' for 1200 years; of major nations only China and Iran, which are truly ancient, are older. Yet it lacks a government of its own. It suffers the reproach of its neighbours for its weight in the Union, yet it is in fact a political non-entity.

This is unsustainable. It is also inherently dangerous. The real possibility exists of a UK government, perhaps a kaleidoscope coalition of Labour, Liberal Democrat and the nationalist parties, taking power at Westminster without a majority of seats in England. At that point existing English Votes for English Laws arrangements (by which only English MPs vote on legislation affecting only England, such as health or justice policy) would break down. In the face of an opposition with a majority of English votes it would be impossible for the UK government to get its English business through Parliament. A de facto English government, i.e. the Conservative opposition, would control the Commons, but lack the powers of ministers to direct civil servants or introduce legislation.

The obvious answer to this constitutional conundrum is to give England a government of its own, as the other nations of the UK have, with just the major strategic functions (economic policy, foreign affairs and defence) reserved to the UK. The UK government should be just that, the government of the UK, rather than the English government with some residual power over the neighbours.

It is, of course, difficult to imagine how a federal union would work when one member of it has six times the population and nine times the GDP of the other members combined. The English government would have a far larger budget than the UK government.

How the ‘English question’ is settled, over what timeframe and in what eventual form, are the proper subjects of a wider national debate about the balance of power in the UK, and indeed our strategy and posture in the world after Brexit and after Covid-19.

The need for this conversation is the simple reason why no referendum must be held on Scottish independence in the immediate future. I am hopeful that a settlement of the English question would help make the Union more sensible and attractive to the other nations in it. It may also be that the development of a robust and ethical ‘environmental nationalism’ as a basis of British foreign policy would make the UK a more attractive alliance than the EU, with its eternal and impotent wranglings.

# Community

## 6. ‘We need a new “economics of place” instead of the failed doctrine of economic mobility’

- We have chronic regional inequality because labour and capital are not as mobile as the economy theory suggests
- Government have reinforced inequality through Higher Education and capital investment policy
- Places need strong identities, and investment in social infrastructure

In this and the next three posts, under the heading ‘Community’, I will try to make the case for a new political and economic settlement for the villages, towns, cities and counties of England.

The starting point is the extreme imbalance that exists between different places within England. We are, as Professor Sir Paul Collier has shown, the most ‘spatially unequal’ country in Europe, with vast regional disparities in wealth, life chances and life expectancy. These disparities have existed for many decades: the ‘distressed areas’ of the 1930s are the ‘left-behind communities’ of today. Yet the immediate cause of our regional inequality is the doctrine that we have followed for the last 40 years: the doctrine of economic mobility.

The Thatcher government was right to close unproductive coal mines and steel mills and return economic production to the private market. But they (and all subsequent governments) got the next stage, the process of deindustrialisation for the communities concerned, badly wrong.

Economic mobility is the idea that left to themselves, capital and labour will find each other. This is of course how industrialisation happened, in a great spontaneous meeting of financial wealth and agricultural workers in the new cities of the north and midlands. In the late 20th century it was assumed that deindustrialisation would happen in the same way. As the factories closed capital would rush in to take advantage of cheap land and labour, and unwanted workers would slip away to new opportunities elsewhere.

Neither happened, or not enough. It turns out capital needs more than derelict buildings and wrongly-skilled people to invest in. And it turns out places are sticky: people would rather stay

with what they know, connected to the places and people they love and care for, than ‘get on their bikes’, as Norman Tebbit said, for a precarious life in a southern city.

According to the doctrine of economic mobility, the role of government is to facilitate the free movement of capital and labour. Investment policy should be ‘spatially blind’ i.e. not concerned about place, but just aimed at wherever the spreadsheets say the biggest return on investment can be found.  The calculation of return on investment, however, favours the deployment of capital and labour in ‘high value’ places and professions. So rather than a genuinely neutral policy reflecting the wishes of the public - let alone a policy reflecting the moral obligation to support the people and places affected by deindustrialisation - government has ‘blindly’ reinforced the inequality that existed already.

Private capital has not flowed into the former industrial towns, but continued to seek its returns in London and the South East. Treasury rules stipulate that the public housebuilding budget must be spent on building new homes in areas of high house prices - not on regenerating down-at-heel places to make them more attractive to mobile businesses and workers.

The response to the financial crisis of 2008 has exacerbated the problem. The capital released into the economy by the Bank of England did not seek new investment opportunities in the North and Midlands, but flowed into assets - mainly housing - in the South East. The price of keeping the financial system afloat was greater asset inequality than ever.

On the labour side, a more proactive measure has been taken to induce economic mobility. Higher Education has expanded from 27% of school leavers in 2010 to 38% today. Spending available for HE institutions has grown proportionately, from £9.8bn to £14.1bn, a rise of 43%. Meanwhile spending on Further Education, the alternative to university that teaches the skills of the local economy, has fallen by 33% over the same period, to £3.4bn.

The effect of the expansion of HE means that millions of bright young people have left their home towns to study in a distant city. Some drift home, wrongly-qualified for the local labour market, with their expectations disappointed and a student debt to pay. Many others never come back, fulfilling the doctrine of economic mobility. Yet the doctrine has demoralised its supposed beneficiaries too. The UK has the smallest houses and the longest commutes in Europe. Young

graduates carry historic levels of debt and pay high rents for housing they can never hope to own.

The era of ‘austerity’ that followed the 2008 crash slowed the growth in budgets for health, education and welfare. But those budgets did continue to grow. The real costs fell on local government, which was still required to fund the ever-growing demand for social care. The result was a sharp fall in public funding for the social infrastructure of communities - the libraries and parks and youth clubs that give life to places and opportunities for people on low incomes.

Austerity compounded trends in the wider economy, the way we work and shop and socialise, that were already hollowing out local communities. A quarter of all pubs, a quarter of all post offices and a fifth of all libraries have closed since the turn of the century. Independent local retailers have been replaced by chain stores, discount shops, pound shops - or no shops at all, but boarded-up ghosts of an economy that no longer functions.

It doesn’t have to continue like this. There is another, happier possibility, for the trends that are hollowing out our communities could save them too. The pandemic has given us glimpses of a better world: more home-working and more neighbourliness, more family time and a more local life. The digital revolution is making obsolete many jobs and industries; it is also creating different ones, and making the towns left behind by industrialisation viable economic centres once again. The internet could yet save the village, the mining town, the coast.

To expedite this process and ensure it benefits everyone, not just the rich, we need a deliberate political and economic strategy to moderate the doctrine of economic mobility. Of course capital and labour must be free to find each other and perform their reproductive, wealth-creating magic. But public policy can frame the manner of their meeting and its effects.

There is no magic formula here. Paul Collier has written of the ‘radical uncertainty’ involved in reviving poor places. But global evidence and common sense suggest some ingredients are probably in common for all successful revivals. The main ingredients of a new ‘economics of place’ are identity and infrastructure.

Investment demands liveable places. The heritage, environment and culture of a place matter as much as its transport links and business facilities. A place needs a sense of itself to hold its bright young people, and to attract others to settle there. New industries build on the foundations of old

ones, whose traces can still be seen. Great Grimsby was once England's, indeed Europe's leading fishing port. It is reinventing itself as a centre of offshore wind, while the historic docks, formerly a polyglot entrepot, are transforming into a centre of the creative industries, both proudly local and boldly global.

And places need infrastructure. This obviously includes the capital assets in which people live and work and move around. Transport and broadband are crucial agents of settlement: people will only choose to live in towns that they can get products, information and themselves in and out of.

But just as important as economic infrastructure is the social infrastructure that makes a community, and helps those people without assets of their own. We need a sustained policy agenda to repopulate neighbourhoods with the institutions of community life. These need not look like they used to. A library, for instance, can do without stacks of books. The 21st century library should be a repository of knowledge but also the centre for adult education, a coworking space and an incubator for start-up businesses. It should be the home of local radio and the local node of a grand national strategy for digital inclusion.

Economic and social infrastructure combine in one of the most essential local services of all: a proper system for nurturing local skills. England badly needs an FE sector to rival our great university network. This should be locally managed, led by employers but especially the employers of the future, so that young people (and retraining older workers) help the evolution of their places, transmitting their economic identity from one generation to the next.

## 7. ‘We need a more social economy: private capital should serve the public good’

- Businesses, like individuals, are relational, and operate in a moral context
- The purpose of a business is to serve the public
- Government could stimulate a boom in the social economy

In the previous post (Proposition 6) I argued that the doctrine of economic mobility and ‘spatial blindness’ (the free movement of labour and capital, and the supposed neutrality of government about where to spend public money) has created a regionally unequal society, harming both the supposed beneficiaries in the economic hotspots as well as those in the places ‘left behind’.

Economic mobility is predicated on Adam Smith’s famous ‘invisible hand’, the magic of the market which arranges the provision of goods and services to the people who need them without a central organising mind. Yet as Smith was the first to say, markets depend on the moral sentiments of the people who inhabit them. Culture, not state power, is the organising mind that enables the invisible hand to work.

Labour operates in a moral context. We expect - or should expect - individuals to make ethical decisions about where to work and what to do, balancing family obligations and self-interest, and conducting themselves well towards colleagues, customers and the wider community. Capital needs a moral framework too.

The legal system recognises this. A business, being ‘incorporated’ - which means ‘embodied’, become a body - is a legal entity with many of the rights and obligations of a human being. A human being, as I have argued in the introductory post (Proposition 1), is essentially relational. We exist as individuals because we belong to a wider group, which gives us identity, safety and freedom. The same goes for businesses. They are not, or should not be, rootless wanderers, scavenging the fruits of civilisation. They are, or should be, connected with the people and situated in the places that bore them. They have obligations to their neighbours, whose work has made them possible. Most of all, they exist - as individuals do - for virtue, with a purpose beyond themselves.

The purpose of a business is to serve the public with what it wants or needs. Profits are a sign this purpose has been fulfilled, and a due recompense to the people who risked their time or

money to make it happen. Yet as Professor Colin Mayer has shown, in the late 20th century this idea was lost and an alternative idea adopted: that the purpose of a company is not to serve the public but to create profits for its owners. ‘The business of business’, said Milton Friedman in 1970, ‘is business.’

In most businesses, as for most of us as individuals, public and private benefit are of course deeply entwined. A company might have an entirely Friedmanite idea of purpose and yet - purely in order to maximise profits - it does the right thing by its employees, its customers and the planet. And an enterprise fixated on public purpose might easily neglect the essential requirement to run a tight ship and stay profitable, and thus do far less good in the world than its selfish rival. Yet - whether it lives up to it or not - the key consideration for any organisation is its ultimate purpose: what it is primarily for.

If more businesses determined that they exist to serve the public, that their owners have a responsibility beyond their own enrichment, a vast transformation is possible. Under the influence of this determination capital would acquire patience, that principal virtue for long-term growth and wellbeing in any person or organisation. Between the extremes of global finance houses and local charities - both equally potentially virtuous, if the purposes of both are the public good - a great ‘social economy’ would appear, including social enterprises and mission-driven businesses.

How do we stimulate the social economy? We need reforms to the Companies Act to allow a firm to register as a mission-driven business. We need to incentivise social investment - capital seeking a social or environmental as well as a financial return - through tax policy. We need public spending, possibly vie endowments, to create pools of capital to support the social economy.

Overall, we need to live better, with a less wasteful, ephemeral, throw-away economy. We need more local production (and more maintenance and refitting of the already produced) and less reliance on debt, consumption and imports. As mentioned in an earlier post (Proposition 3), we need more security of our food and energy supplies, and that means more local generation of both. We need more entrepreneurs, more artisans and inventors and innovators.

## 8. ‘In public services we can have quality in abundance, not equity in scarcity’

- Public services are too centralised and individualised
- ‘Social solutions’ are growing through the cracks in the Attlee settlement
- We need a place-based model of public services which draws on the huge resources of local communities

I argued in the previous post (Proposition 7) that we need a more social economy, in which businesses deliberately pursue a purpose beyond themselves and their owners’ profits.

We also need a more ‘social’ public sector. Currently, for all the enormous public benefit they deliver, public services are deeply wasteful and deeply disempowering of individuals and families, of the staff who work in them and of the communities they serve. This is because they are too centralised, too siloed, too rationed, too individualised, and too reactive.

Public services are too centralised. The structures of the welfare state remain largely those created by Clement Attlee’s postwar government. This was an era of professional authority when the men in bowler hats or white coats knew best, and the recipients of services were expected to be grateful for what they got. And so we have large Whitehall departments responsible for organising comprehensive, universal services, meeting all the needs of all the people.

Public services are too siloed. These departments meet at the top, via their ministers, round the Cabinet table. But on the ground, where it matters, they belong to different fiefs, accountable upwards through a dense bureaucracy and unable to collaborate or pool resources.

Public services are too rationed. The system is designed to deliver ‘equity in scarcity’: a fair distribution of limited resources. The result is a great bureaucracy which sucks up resources and responsibility from the front-line where resources and responsibility are most needed. In recent decades we have clad Attlee’s aging structures in the gleaming veneer of private sector expertise and agility. The doctrine of ‘New Public Management’ sought to modernise the public sector through quasi-markets, purchaser-provider splits, unit costs and competition. Yet the basic model remains: top-down silos, ‘delivering’ ‘services’ (command and control in the language of the market) to a passive population.

Public services are too individualised. They are designed for individual recipients, ‘service users’ or ‘customers’ in the bloodless phrases of the modern public sector. Little thought is given to the wider family and community context in which the individual lives, and which is probably a far greater influence on their wellbeing than whatever tightly rationed ‘service’ they receive from government.

Public services are too reactive. In the early days of the welfare state ‘needs’ were generally critical and acute: the cataclysms of sudden, usually short-lived ill-health or unemployment. Systems are designed to respond to things having gone wrong, rather than working to prevent them going wrong. Resources and status concentrate in acute remedial services.

The nature of demand has changed fundamentally over the decades since Attlee. Rather than sharp swift periods of ill-health, many people experience long-term health conditions, and often they, not doctors, have the best ideas of the treatment and care they need. Rather than short gaps of unemployment we have generational joblessness for some, and for others a precarious life juggling earned income, in-work benefits and welfare.

The supply of public services - the way we meet the needs of the population - is changing too. A range of organic ‘social solutions’ are growing through the cracks in the structures of the Attlee settlement. Social prescribing (sending people to a gardening club or a choir rather than giving them pills, for instance) is being adopted in the NHS. The work of charities and faith groups in welfare, criminal justice and family support is being recognised and expanded. In education, free schools set up by groups of teachers or parents are challenging the monopoly of government, and the growing home-school movement demonstrates the ability of families and communities to educate children outside the school system altogether.

The pandemic and lockdown showed the power of neighbourhoods to self-organise and arrange mutual support. As with the examples above, this is in a sense a return to a more old-fashioned model of community self-help. Despite the bureaucracies, nature finds a way - especially when technology helps.

We need a successor to New Public Management and this time we need to transform, not just modernise and part-privatise, the Attlee-era public sector. At the heart of the new model is the motto that delivered Brexit: take back control. We need to dismantle the great bureaucracies of

the welfare state - the postwar concrete, the steel and glass of New Public Management, and make instead local institutions of local stone, albeit properly wired together by efficient digital and data systems. We need ‘vernacular’ local services run by and for local people. These will be just as comprehensive and universal, just as well funded and well regulated, but their organising principle will be different.

The new public service model is organised around places, not government departments, and it is accountable outwards and downwards to local partners and communities, not upwards to Whitehall. Most of all its purpose is to prevent social challenges as well treating them. The ‘place’ focus will allow pooling of budgets and strategies across Whitehall silos, and allow the resulting savings to be reinvested in the parts of the local ecosystem that would benefit most.

As this suggests, policy should deliberately seek to reduce the demand for expensive acute public services rather than simply increasing or cutting (depending on the times and the party in government) the supply of them.

Rather than a model of ‘equity in scarcity’ we should aim for ‘quality in abundance’. For despite the dire position of the public finances, we are not short of the resources we need. There are enough people to teach our children, care for our sick and elderly, help our addicts and homeless. They are not all in the formal public sector or formally qualified. But there are millions of people available to support the professionals.

In a later post (Proposition 10) I suggest that as machines take over the manual and clerical jobs, human beings will be left with the things that humans are best at - and this includes looking after other people. The current ‘equity in scarcity’ model is absurdly straitened: 30 children to one teacher; 100 prisoners to one officer; ten elderly people to one care worker. These are shameful ratios. Instead we should be flooding the system with personnel, trained and managed as necessary but qualified most of all in common sense, duty and compassion - qualified in the virtues.

## 9. ‘We need a new principle of “community power” to let people take back control of their neighbourhoods’

- Successive governments have reduced the power and competence of local councils
- We need more power for councils - but also for communities themselves
- The UK should lead the world in innovations in democracy and local governance

In the three preceding posts I have argued for a more local (Proposition 6) and a more social economy (Proposition 7), and for public services to be shaped by and accountable to communities (Proposition 8). This final post under ‘Community’ makes the most radical suggestion. We need a profound redistribution of power from central government to local places.

England, despite lacking a state of its own, is one of the most centralised nations in the world. [Fully 75% of spending on local services is given to local agencies by central government, with strict instructions on how to spend it.] In no other country of our size are local communities controlled by the centre to the degree that ours are.

As described in earlier posts (Proposition 2 and Proposition 8), the post-war years saw new central bureaucracies created to manage health and welfare. Over time, and particularly recently, education has become detached from local government. Of the major services only social care remains funded and overseen by local councils, which now allocate over half their budgets to this function. Meanwhile, the decades have seen a steady loss in councils’ power to raise money themselves.

Why is this? There is an obvious reason. Local councils have often been very bad stewards of the local economy and public sector. In the 1980s, infamously, London and Liverpool were led by far-left councils which nearly bankrupted their cities. And today councils are not free of incompetence, cronyism, and a purblind protectionism that hampers innovation and growth.

But the more substantial reason for the diminution of local government is that the doctrine of economic mobility, described above (Proposition 6), chafes against the particularity of local places. A ‘spatially blind’ investment policy - sending public money where the quickest and biggest return could be found, without reference to local needs or circumstances - demands as smooth a landscape as possible.

The new ‘economics of place’ requires greater variation in the political topography of the country. Cities, counties and towns need greater powers. Recent steps towards devolution of power to mayors in the biggest English cities pave the way for a more substantial decentralisation.

The English roll their eyes at the idea of more local politicians. But this is a cynicism born of despair. We need mayors in every city and perhaps even elected leaders (sheriffs, they should be called, from the Saxon) for counties.

But the main event of the revolution we need isn’t a transfer of power from one layer of government to another. The apparently perverse public resistance to more local democracy is the consequence of decades of local politicians disregarding the communities they represent. The real change we need is for communities themselves - not councils - to take back control.

A new wind is blowing through local government. In 2010, with deep cuts coming to local authority budgets, the town of Wigan decided to use austerity as a means of transformation. The council’s leadership reduced head office staff but kept front-line services open by empowering staff with more discretion; by exhorting and trusting residents to take more responsibility, for instance over recycling and public health; and by inviting community groups to take over public assets and functions and manage them independently of the council. Wigan has a flatter bureaucracy and a greater diversity of organisations managing the public realm, and it supports good conduct - virtue, as I’ve called it (Proposition 1) - among residents. This is the corollary to the leaner, more capable and strategic central state we need (Proposition 3).

Like the organic ‘social solutions’ growing through the cracks in the welfare state (Proposition 8), new democratic innovations are challenging the old model of council power. The Community Organising model, which has been quietly underway with government support for the last decade, enables local people to take action together on the things that matter, challenging local government or public services but also assuming agency themselves.

As I wrote in a report last summer, ‘New models of direct democracy, both digitally enabled and via old-new methods of gathering people together for deliberation and decision making, are being developed in different places around the world. The UK should aspire to lead the world in innovations in democracy, using the tools of deliberative democracy, participatory budgeting,

citizen assemblies and others, to create the plural public square we need: less paternal, hierarchical, bureaucratic and remedial; more collaborative, entrepreneurial and preventative.'

As this suggests, technology offers great opportunities to deepen and broaden our democracy. We should confidently press ahead with digital means to engage and consult the public.

In addition to widening and improving participation, tech offers a breakthrough for community power through the effective use of data. Public and private agencies - including the social media giants - collect vast amounts of information about places and the way that people use them. This information should all properly belong to the local community itself, and be used to inform decision-making.

These innovations - Community Organising, citizen assemblies, a new data-led approach to local decision-making - are challenging to the traditionalist instinct. Yet it wasn't much more than a hundred years ago that traditionalists were objecting to representative democracy itself. They objected because they feared that democracy would disrupt the old, organic, natural relationships through which public and expert opinion could be heard, and public and private interests reconciled. They were, in a sense, right. We need to broaden the conversation beyond formal democracy, which of course retains its place as the foundation of political legitimacy but which can be supplemented with old-new models...

In different guises conservatives and Conservatives have argued for two centuries that government should, in Disraeli's phrase, 'trust the people'. This is not a call for democratic extremism, a reduction of all power and decision-making to the blunt instrument of a popular majority. Indeed, it is a call for a more nuanced, variegated polity where expertise and professional hierarchy are respected and given voice. But alongside the experts we need the people, who are experts themselves in what they want and need.

# Family

## 10. ‘People are naturally skilled for the work of the future: the vocations of care and creativity’

- Automation is making manual and clerical jobs redundant
- Human beings are uniquely good at creative and caring roles, and we should focus on developing skills and opportunities here
- There is a special role for young people in helping society adapt to the new world we are entering

Previous posts have argued that to be safe, free and happy, individuals need membership of a strong nation and a strong community. My final three posts focus on the family. This is the association most dear to most of us, the first and last loyalty where we learn and practice the habits of trust that make communities and nations possible. ‘The sources of the commonwealth are in the households’, said Edmund Burke.

Yet the family is generally overlooked in policy and politics. This is due to a combination of hostility (from the Left, who regard traditional families as oppressive), reverence (from the conservative Right, who consider families too sacred to be touched by the state) or indifference (from the liberal Right, who see families as non-economic agents and therefore irrelevant). Yet family, and its begetter, love and sex, is what we think about and care about most. With community and nation, it is a true object of politics and policy.

The most significant immediate influence on the wellbeing of families is the work available to adults. And the world of work is changing utterly. We can expect many forms of paid work to be made redundant by automation, further imperilling the ‘precariat’ class of over-qualified, underpaid, insecure workers. The people and places left behind are at risk of further regress, further demoralisation. The impact on families and children will be devastating.

Yet there is a brighter prospect, if we get things right: a labour market that creates the conditions for virtue. As I explained in the introductory post (Proposition 1) the virtues are the ‘excellences of the species’, the things that human beings are uniquely good at. They are the qualities and

practices that make us useful and fulfilled. And the virtues are most fully expressed in the two vocations in most urgent demand in the new world of work: the vocations of care and creativity.

It is, perhaps sadly, not true to say that machines - automation, robotics, Artificial Intelligence and so on - are simply good at the routine business of life, the functions of sorting and harvesting, while we'll always need humans for the 'higher' functions of design and innovation. The machines can design airports, compose symphonies, invent treatments too. And yet the world needs people for their creativity, if only to give one another the sense that we inhabit a world made by ourselves, not designed for us by an algorithm.

This need is reflected in a cultural shift that is underway. For all the thrilling futurity around us, people are seeking connection with the old and the organic. In the shadow of globalism, between the City of London and Canary Wharf, indeed right in the tech district dubbed with British self-deprecation 'Silicon Roundabout', is Shoreditch, home to hipsters in beards and dungarees. The culture is into slow food, bicycles, folk music; we are modernising to a conservative soundtrack, and this is good.

The creative virtues are not supplemented but necessitated by the age of tech. We need experiments in good living, and to do this we need artisans and entrepreneurs, inventors, innovators and artists.

There is a special role for young people here. In every previous civilisation, adolescence was the time of learning the ropes, of being inducted into the knowledge and skills of the adult society you are joining, which was little different from the society of a generation before. Adolescence was also usually a short period, for people grew up quickly in the old days. Today, however, young people experience an attenuated adolescence lasting into their 20s and even beyond - a long period of discovery in which they, not we, are the teachers. They will induct us, not the other way around, into the world they are making.

This is why, alongside the artisans and entrepreneurs, we also need moralists: teachers and preachers to guide our young guides in this bewildering new world. For the old ideas - the ideas of virtue, and of the social covenant more widely - are the ones the new world needs. Given the great new powers young people will acquire, we need them to grow up with a proper respect for the culture they are heir to, and a proper founding in the ethics of its traditions.

This moral framework is relevant to the other great vocation we need more of: the vocation of care. Everyone knows from their own lives the foundational need for, and value of, human help when we are weak - at the start and end of life, and at moments of illness or trauma in between. The giving of this care may, possibly, be physically possible for some automaton of the near future, but it is unthinkable that we would ever want our children nursed by a machine, or a robot to hold our hand as we die.

As automation liberates us from deskbound clerical work - as it liberated previous generations from field and factory - new roles are opening up in the service of other people. In an earlier post (Proposition 8) I argued we can have abundance, not scarcity, in public services. Instead of the straightened ratios of the current system - one teacher to thirty children, one care worker to ten old people - we could flood society with help.

The pandemic has shown us what families and communities are potentially capable of. We can and should accelerate the transition that is underway, and help people play a role helping others, whether at home or in the community, or in some creative endeavour, or - where many jobs should be - in the environment. We need to be imaginative about financing this work, and about the potential for old-new forms of collective action and mutual support, such as trade unions once were, to help protect and equip people for it.

## 11. ‘The household is properly an economic institution, sustained by a better work-life balance’

- Industrialisation and deindustrialisation have disrupted the economic basis of the household
- Policy seems designed to make the home as uncomfortable and pointless as possible
- A better settlement would help women and men do more of what they want, including the choice to spend more time at home

In order to fully realise the vision of human beings fulfilled in the vocations of care and creativity (Proposition 10) we need a restored idea of the family as an economic institution.

This idea is apparent in the origin of our word ‘economy’, which derives from oikos, Greek for household. Traditionally, the household was a mechanism for managing the cooperation of adults to provide for themselves and their dependents. This mechanism enabled cooperation outside the household too: the community of oikoi formed the economy of the neighbourhood.

This model was disrupted by industrialisation, which brought small family units to the cities and broke up the community of oikoi. And so emerged the ‘nuclear’ family. The household gradually lost its economic function. Families became dependent on the single male wage earner, and the home became a purely domestic sphere, celebrated sentimentally in story and song but lacking its traditional materialist basis.

As Petra Bueskens and others have argued, the era of the self-sufficient nuclear family, which reached its peak in the years 1950-1965, was an historic anomaly, and not a successful one. For the well-off, it meant fathers commuting long distances for long hours away from their families, and women confined to a parody of domestic life, subsisting on gossip, shopping and valium. For the less well-off, it reduced the support structures available in difficult times, putting intolerable pressure on the adults and diminishing the social and emotional opportunities of children. And it left old people out altogether, rattling around in too-big houses or consigned to care homes.

If industrialisation disrupted the traditional family, deindustrialisation completed the work of destruction. The economy which had sustained the single male wage earner fell away. Welfare stepped in, making the man redundant at home as he was unwanted at work.

The effect of deindustrialisation was compounded by ‘second-wave’ feminism, the campaign for women’s sexual and economic independence now that political and civil liberty (the object of the ‘first wave’) had been won. For many women, sadly, second-wave feminism simply meant their new enslavement to a working world designed for 1950s men.

Work can give a person a sense of independence, capability and purpose. But it can also be mere drudgery, with an opportunity cost it is difficult to put a price on. As my colleague Miriam Cates put it recently,

> *‘So much of our recent attention in the UK has rightly been focused on trying to enable women to have both a career and a family life, with more free childcare, more flexible working, equal pay and excellent maternity rights. This has certainly benefited women who are well paid, with careers that are stimulating, rewarding, and influential. But many women don’t have a career, they have a job. And for many women, if they had a choice, they would spend more time with their children and less time in the workplace. In previous generations, women did not have the choice to work. But in modern Britain, many women no longer have the choice to not work.*
>
> *‘So for many women, there is no choice but to work long hours, not in some stimulating, highly rewarding professional role, but in a job that pulls them away from their young children, and denies them the time and energy they want to spend on their families. A recent YouGov survey showed that 78% of mothers of pre-schoolers would prefer to work part time or not at all.’*

At the moment, policy seems designed to make the home as uncomfortable, expensive, and pointless as possible. The tax system treats each adult as a distinct isolated individual and penalises single-earner couples. The benefits system penalises couples who live together. We have childcare subsidies that only work if you put your children into a professional nursery for most of the day. Higher education policy makes young people study far from home, for jobs that only exist in the big cities. The social care system pressures you to put your parent into residential care, and if you’re even moderately rich, makes you sell the family home to pay for it.

A new ‘economy of place’ (Proposition 6) and more ‘social’ public services (Proposition 8) will help with some of this. But more profoundly we need to recover the conception of the household

as a place of production. This vision is of course a romantic one, and is easier to imagine in old-fashioned settings, especially rural communities. Yet it is an old-new vision, for it is particularly possible in the economy, and with the technology, of the 21st century. We can imagine a revived attention to the old skills of husbandry and craft, with both men and women working largely interchangeably in a range of roles that are, crucially, closer to home, and that call on the virtues of care and creativity (see Proposition 10).

'Husbandry' is the basics, the vital role of care: honourable generic work to look after people, animals, and plants, and the work of the home itself, and the garden. 'Craft' is the specialist work of creativity. It might be done alone in an attic office or the shed, or in collaboration with others at a local maker-space or co-working centre.

This is not to imagine a revived cottage industry, where every family makes its own clothes and food. We still need the division of labour, the comparative advantage and specialisation that Adam Smith celebrated. But the chain of added value need not end miles from our front door. Just as food is better when prepared at home, with ingredients sourced locally or at least sustainably, so our relationship with other products might benefit from assembly (and crucially repair, rather than disposal and replacement) in or closer to the home. As Patrick Deneen puts it, 'the ability to do and make things for oneself - to provision one's own households through the work of one's own and one's children's hands - should be prized above consumption and waste.'

Hastened by the pandemic, more people are working from home or near home. Mary Harrington has put forward a range of suggestions for how we might revive the local domestic economy, from mutual childcare arrangements to relaxations in planning policy to allow 'front-room retail' and domestic manufacture.

As this suggests, the new social covenant requires a different sort of feminism to that of the second wave, which sought the overthrow of the 'patriarchal' family so that women could have the same life as men. 'Maternal feminism', as championed by Louise Perry and others, argues for a greater liberation, so what women who are also mothers can have more of what they want.

This is actually a more radical platform than earlier forms of feminism, at least as it affects the world of work. For it envisages a profound alteration in our economic model, which will give to

men as well as women the opportunity to operate in an economy that suits and supports family and community life.

## 12. ‘Marriage is a public institution and essential to society’

- Marriage is the way society regulates baby-making - a liberal way of ensuring more children grow up in a stable family
- Marriage is becoming a middle-class phenomenon, further exacerbating inequality
- We have successively abolished the economic and legal structures which support marriage; we can replace these with new ones

I have argued (Proposition 5) that to strengthen the nation we need a new constitutional settlement for the United Kingdom, and (Proposition 9) that to strengthen communities we need a new legal commitment to ‘community power’. In this final post I suggest we need a new commitment to the legal form at the heart of most families: marriage.

This apparently outdated institution is nevertheless the essential component of a virtuous society. If society is a web or net, marriages are the knots that hold it together. Without it the ropes tangle up and slide apart, and society’s most vulnerable people - children, old people, the unwell and lonely - fall through the gaps.

What is the purpose of marriage? The benefits of companionship and financial security, and of support for the most vulnerable, are secondary to its main purpose, from which indeed these benefits derive. Marriage represents the regulation of baby-making. It is, or was, the framework of legal and social permissions in which children are created and, crucially, brought up. It is, or was, a means of tying men into family life, for their own good and that of women and children. It is not, or was not, a mere confirmation of romantic attachment.

Procreation is a matter of public interest - even though the business of procreation is, we all agree, a private affair. How to reconcile this tension? Marriage is the answer. By offering legal privileges, social status and financial assistance to couples who commit to staying together and staying faithful, we indirectly, and without interfering in anyone’s life, regulate the having and upbringing of children.

No successful society in history has practised an unregulated sexual free-for-all. This very obviously degenerates into a bonanza for selfish, laddish men, who exploit the license to take the

pleasures of sex without the responsibilities. In every successful society, the explicit deal is that sex comes with commitment.

Not every marriage produces children, and certainly not all children of married couples are brought up safely or happily. But politics must generalise, and all evidence and common sense tells us that the more marriages that happen and endure, the better for all of us. The institution of marriage - the vows, the legal privileges and the culture around it - is a strong nudge towards virtue.

There remains among middle class society a vestigial idea that to be married is to be grown-up and responsible, and one of the crowd. This somewhat empty rationale helps explain why marriage is not more deliberately promoted in politics and the media, despite the great majority of politicians and journalists being married themselves. The other reason for our cultural silence is that the public discourse is infected with, or scared of, the second-wave feminist belief that traditional family forms are oppressive towards women. So as Charles Murray says, the elite decline to 'preach what they practice', and have allowed the steady destruction of an institution that, more than any other, helps poorer families survive and thrive.

In the last generation governments have successively dismantled the legal and fiscal structures which supported the institution of marriage. First we removed its economic basis by deciding to tax people as individuals rather than as couples (in Nigel Lawson's 1990 reforms). Then we removed its physical basis by abolishing sex as an expected component of marriage (in the 2013 Equal Marriage Act). Most recently we have removed its emotional and practical basis, and voided the marriage vow itself, by enabling either spouse to terminate a marriage at will, without the consent of their partner or evidence of irretrievable breakdown (through the 2020 Divorce, Dissolution and Separation Act).

These steps are probably irreversible. But there is much that could be done to shore up marriage from without, even if its internal structures have been removed. Most people want to get married, and this can be encouraged through more generous treatment in the tax and benefit system and through stronger official approbations of marriage.