

Ours are not the Children of the Nobles

by [Joel Hirst](#) (December 2018)



The Fight between Carnival and Lent, Pieter Bruegel the Elder, 1559

After a long hot day in Africa fighting the anarchy that came—heralding our arriving ordeal, an ordeal which is only just beginning—I sometimes sit down on my sofa wine-glass in hand, a silky red imported from somewhere or somewhere else and, with the gentle purring of the generator in the background, I turn to my latest pastime. I've been taken recently with watching the series "The Last Kingdom"; about the unification of England under Alfred the Great. The protagonist is Uhtred, a Saxon boy raised as a Viking who switches back to become Alfred's most faithful soldier. The first time they meet, Uhtred—fleeing the brutality of the

Danes—is in the ancient garden courtyard of a Roman Governor to Winchester; its one-time lord long-dead, along with the empire which had brought sophistication and beauty for a season to the rough isle until it too had fallen away. All that remained were the ruins, ancient whispers of opulence and prosperity. The palace is run-down, decaying and overrun. The gardens no longer glisten, the once-delicate mosaics on the floor have been dug up and covered over with refuse and mud; the chipped pillars are missing their decorations, the roof tiles sag in places, opening the interior halls to the vacant sky above. Heated water no longer runs under the tiles inside providing warmth and comfort; the private bathrooms, stopped up and stinking after people long since abandoned them to return to defecate in shallow holes dug into the ground behind.

“What is this place?” asks the Viking. “It is an old Roman palace,” responds the Dane’s companion. “It is lovely, I could find peace here.” Peace from the world outside; where even the nobles’ hair crawled with lice and fleas; where the stench was unbearable; where boils covered people’s skin and nobody could escape the pains which came from inside and killed swiftly and mysteriously. Where they lived alongside their pigs; worked the fields from dawn to dusk seven days a week, bare hands ripping away at sod, fingernails bleeding—or the occasional blunted plow forged from an ancient piece of armor leftover from the Romans, a land “. . . which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short”. As Hobbes once wrote.

What struck me, a time and place so far in our past as is the story of Alfred the Great was in a way its own dystopian world, its own post-apocalyptic wasteland; resonating as it

did for those who lived there of an ancient historic glory hidden by the mists of time and unknowing to be reclaimed if possible. Of the remains of something that had fallen away, which must have been grand. “Nobody uses the Roman roads,” Alfred at one point laments, “for they have fallen into ruin.”

Ruin.

History is cyclical, not linear as we would like to believe. Even the vaunted technology used by the anti-Malthusians to ridicule that oldest and somehow most prescient of political economists; is also cyclical, for it responds to the common knowledge and generalized prosperity of those who can use the delicate tools. And we are all Malthusians now; because though his math might have been off, providing fodder for the mockers and the Keynesian oligarchs, he was maybe one of our greatest thinkers. He brought into the modern world, overpopulated and messy and unequal, that sacred idea of scarcity.

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Scarcity is not something we want to talk about much. Angus Deaton and Thomas Piketty tell us of our “Great Escape”. Aren't we living better than we ever have? Isn't wealth increasing exponentially even as the population of the planet doubles and doubles and doubles yet again? Haven't all the doomsayers always been wrong? Scarcity, that must be one of those ridiculous 'classical liberal' ideas that died with Malthus

and Smith.

Notwithstanding the scorn, scarcity is real. Scarcity is economic. Currently the USG has run hundreds of billions of dollars of deficits for more than a decade, almost two. The United States Government currently owes \$21,000,000,000,000; the global debt level has reached more than \$180,000,000,000,000. Bad debt crowding out good debt (if there is such a thing); incentives to saving jettisoned by our desperate elites anxious for more money to spend on technocratic fixes which fix nothing. An unpayable amount, and to which nobody has any answer; except an eventual default—look at modern Venezuela (or ancient 9th century Wessex) if you want to know what that would look like. Scarcity, however, is not only economic. It is environmental too*[i]*. “As the author Jason Hickel points out, a decoupling of rising GDP from global resource use has not happened and will not happen. While 50bn tons of resources used per year is roughly the limit the Earth’s systems can tolerate, the world is already consuming 70bn tons. At current rates of economic growth, this will rise to 180bn tons by 2050. Maximum resource efficiency, coupled with massive carbon taxes, would reduce this at best to 95bn tons: still way beyond environmental limits. Green growth, as members of the institute appear to accept, is physically impossible.” The sixth great extinction; the destruction of our oceans—the lungs of the world. “Almost all of our world’s oceans have been negatively affected by the impacts of humanity, a new study has revealed. Just 13% of the world’s oceans remain without damage and home to naturally occurring high levels of marine life*[ii]*.” Deforestation at an all-time high, “In tropical regions around the world, tree cover is disappearing that quickly: Every minute of every day over the last two years, a tract the size of 40 football fields was clear-cut or burned to increase production of soy, cattle, palm oil, and wood products.*[iii]*” Every year

consuming from our earth more than it can replenish, thereby taking from our children, and eventually our grandchildren. Easter Island on a global scale.

This is incidentally not a discussion about climate change. Climate science (in the 'Paris Accord' political way) is a bait-and-switch by the oligarchs who do not know scarcity and who consequently cannot see the problem, or at best misidentify it. To them (and the third-world nobility represented at the U.N. and other globalist institutions) it is an issue of 'social justice' seen through the lens of oppression and with the goal of redistributive economics. 'There is enough for everybody,' so the idea goes, 'if only it were more evenly distributed.' The problem is that this idea is wrong; and even if it were not a tool by our new nobilities to attempt to continue to 'manage' our worlds, it retains the self-same weaknesses of socialism/communism: 'climate science' thinks in redistributive economics not scarcity. Which is why having the socialists (at the United Nations, in the media, in the regulating agencies of the world) attempt to manage our dramatically unraveling scarcity problem is not going to work. And isn't that what all this should be about, saving our world from our rapidly arriving mess?

Author Kevin MacKay calls this all "terminal disfunction"[\[iv\]](#). "Control by oligarchs, he (MacKay) argues, thwarts rational decision-making, because the short-term interests of the elite are radically different to the long-term interests of society. This explains why past civilizations have collapsed 'despite possessing the cultural and technological know-how needed to resolve their crises'. Economic elites, which benefit from social dysfunction, block the necessary solutions."

Mackay here is talking of moral hazard. The problem with nobility since the very days of their inception is their disconnectedness to the land and the world around them; though their decisions cause famine, they never go hungry (Let them eat cake!!). Though their decisions cause war, their children never fight and die. Protected in privileged zip codes or in Elysium surrounded by concertina wire and guards they have no stake in the upcoming apocalypse and are protected from its most pernicious repercussions—at least for a time.

Like Alfred I am the king of lost places, the peripheries. Places where as Robert Kaplan wrote [\[v\]](#) (25 years ago) “. . . environmental scarcity will inflame existing hatreds and affect power relationships, at which we now look.” Lands where the immediate existential effects of the scarcity can be chocked up to “dictatorship” or “bad governance” or “poor public financial management” or any number of technocratic fixes upon the rolling road of ruin; all with appropriate ‘packages’ to buy time, and commanded by those who are from the protected cul-de-sacs and privileged zip codes and do not know how ruin happens. Those whose moral hazard is almost total. Roman nobles in Winchester’s ancient bath houses feasting even as Rome herself was being sacked.

The difference to all this and the world of Alfred the Great is of course scale. The population of the civilization which had built the roads and heated floors (the Romans) was probably four million people upon the English isle. That number had fallen to roughly 1.8 million during Alfred’s time (at the time of the famed Domesday Book—in 1083—there were probably two million English). The fall of Rome was an extinction level event. Today there are 55 million English in a world much more interconnected, globalization (which is different from globalism) making the problems harder to solve

because they are more interconnected. “Disastrous tipping points loom in several of civilization’s systems—from the collapse of ocean ecology to the threat of nuclear war. In addition, because the crisis cannot be contained in one part of the globe, the dysfunctions can’t be dealt with in isolation.”

The problem too is an issue of politics and tribe—which is both the cause and the result of our current global political impasse. Even MacKay, describing well the problem, paints only one “side” of the mess as the villains, thereby giving the others a pass. And in unthinking criticism of capitalism (which manages scarcity moderately better—especially absent the perverse incentives of free FED money on a naturally balancing economy) while decrying crony capitalism (without identifying it, because he does not know the difference) he becomes an apologist for the socialists who do not understand scarcity and hence will take us from the frying pan directly into the fire (case in point; well, everywhere they have ever been in charge—but most recently Venezuela). Of course the other tribe sees the desired outcome of ‘climate redistribution’ efforts and worries that any attempt to address scarcity (environmental or otherwise) would come at a political cost to themselves (short-term ‘electoral’ fears) and inadvertently empower the socialist redistributionists (who, we know, will make things worse).

So we’re stuck. The real solution? I’m not sure there is one; and I’m not sanguine about our ability to avoid our arriving ordeal. I’m also so tired of those ‘opinion pieces’ demanding this or that or the other ‘fix’ by which the author assures the world we may be able to avoid the apocalypse. The problem is so enormous, so interconnected, so rife with interests of short-thinking nobility and desperate poor that it is perhaps

without solution. And I will not reduce the depth of the upcoming disaster to a three-sentence “solution”.

Incidentally, some of us will be okay; and that is the main problem, isn't it? The new oligarchs will probably survive just fine, as Kaplan says, “We are entering a bifurcated world. Part of the globe is inhabited by Hegel's and Fukuyama's Last Man, healthy, well fed, and pampered by technology. The other, larger, part is inhabited by Hobbes's First Man, condemned to a life that is “poor, nasty, brutish, and short.” Although both parts will be threatened by environmental stress, the Last Man will be able to master it; the First Man will not.” Elites in an artificial satellite world circling a planet destroyed and dirty and violent.

And the world we love so much? Our lives, our children, our travels and literature and plays? The politics about which we obsess over micro-brewed beer and range-fed steak? More probably our children's children will live like those of Uhtred, working dawn till dusk seven days a week in Alfred of Wessex's “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short” world. For ours are not the children of the nobles.

[\[i\]](#) “The Earth is in a death spiral. It will take radical action to save us”, Monbiot George. The Guardian, November 14, 2018.

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/nov/14/earth-death-spiral-radical-action-climate-breakdown>

[\[ii\]](#) “Wilderness Map Reveals Only 13% of World's Oceans Is

Untouched by Humans”, Miley, Jessica. “Interesting Engineering” July 27, 2018
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[iii] “Tropical Forest Loss Slowed in 2017–To the Second Worst Total Ever”, Leahy, Stephen. National Geographic, June 27, 2018
<https://news.nationalgeographic.com/2018/06/tropical-deforestation-forest-loss-2017/>

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<https://www.resilience.org/stories/2018-09-25/the-ecological-crisis-is-a-political-crisis/>

[v] “The Coming Anarchy”, Kaplan, Robert, The Atlantic, February 1994
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Joel D. Hirst is a writer and novelist; his most recent novel is [*I, Charles, From the Camps*](#). He was a Fellow in Human Freedom at the George W. Bush Institute in Dallas and an International Affairs Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations. He has a Masters from Brandeis University. He tweets @joelhirst and his public facebook is @JoelDHirst

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