

Book review

Green Philosophy. How to Think Seriously about the Planet

Roger Scruton

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Roger Scruton is a British philosopher, writer and commentator, as well as an academic lecturer. He wrote more than thirty books. He is concerned with political and cultural essay writing and ethics. He is also a novelist. As he himself admits, he is a conservative. The book under review has been widely acclaimed in the British press.

It is worth ensuring those readers who associate the term philosophy with difficult language that the book is written in a comprehensive way, to which certainly contributed its Polish translators – Justyna Grzegorzczak and Rafał Paweł Wierchosławski.

Scruton's message is clear: he wants to show the contribution of the conservatives to the environmental debate. Due to the complexity of this issue, different opinions and proposals appear in the discussion. They are expressed in attitudes of skepticism, extreme pessimism or catastrophism. One may often come across the opinion that government resources are needed to solve environmental problems.

Roger Scruton believes that if the implementation of major projects is in the hands of bureaucrats, it tends to be out of control. This solution results in negative side effects and the deterioration of the environment. According to the author, no major project will succeed *if it is not rooted in practical local reasoning of small-scale* (p. 8). Thus, the author believes that environmental problems should be transferred to the local level, because only then they can be considered "their own" and adequately solved in conjunction with appropriate oral values. *That is, I think, the constant message of conservatism* (p. 9).

Scruton clearly advocates limiting the role of the state in solving environmental problems. Whereas the state should create the conditions for the protection of the environment and generate a positive motivation of the society. He calls this motivation oikophilia, which can be defined as loving home (the environment). Spoiling the environment begins when people stop treating it as a home and hand it over to bureaucrats.

It is difficult to present in this review the whole wealth of problems and arguments presented by R. Scruton in his book. Therefore, the focus is on those issues that the reviewer believes are worthy of attention and discussion. In the first chapter, "Local

Warming”, the author points to a conflict between economic balance and ecological balance, because these are not the idea of the same order. He has a discussion here on the differences between the “left” and the “right”. He believes that only the right can generate in a society non-egotistic motives that will serve environmental objectives well in the long term (p. 15). Such motives can only be raised at local level, hence the title of the chapter.

In the second part of his book, R. Scruton deals with the climate. This section of the book is entitled “Global alarm”, which emphasizes the significance of the problem. This is not a new problem because it has long been of interest to scientists, but it was only at the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries that climate change was introduced into the daily debates, frightening us catastrophic visions. R. Scruton mentions the names of many the “gurus” of the global warming, including, among others, A. Gore, and he wonders whether this problem can be solved through international agreements and research.

Already at the beginning of chapter three entitled “The Search for Salvation” noted that *the discussions on climate change teach us one thing, that science does not destroy the difference in opinions, even if this discussion is about facts*. This phenomenon is explained by different attitudes of people: an individualist, an egalitarian, a hierarchy supporter and a fatalist. This is what makes people basically and permanently divided in terms of assessing the risk of a climate disaster. This in turn shows that the assessment of climate change is an extremely complex issue. And ecologists, on the other hand, argue that any solution to this problem, which is ideal from the point of view of theory, collapses when it comes to the government – bureaucrats. Environmental regulations are stifled on the basis of the precautionary principle.

In the next chapter entitled “Radical Precaution”, the author of the reviewed book elaborates on the issue of caution. In this chapter the reader will find, for example, considerations on the origin and interpretation of the precautionary principle. This principle is linked to the decision-making theory. The uncertain situation is the most difficult one for a decision-maker. Having limited insight into as to the future state of affairs he or she cannot predict the consequences of his or her decisions.

The precautionary principle, apparently rational, also acts as a brake on the development of science and innovation. R. Scruton sees certain solutions in risk management, which can “weaken” the caution of the decision-maker. In the conclusion of the chapter, the author writes: *We must do our best to avoid a catastrophe (climate), no matter how unlikely it may be to come*” (p. 152).

Here the question should be asked – what to do about it? The answer to this question can be found in the next chapter, entitled “Market Solutions and Homeostasis”. As befits the philosopher, the two proposed solutions have a very general overtone and there are many controversial issues. The first solution is to describe the climate problems in terms of crippling disaster. This approach should radically change the way of life. This means that the government importance is growing and political and economic regulations are being introduced. R. Scruton, who is a conservative, believes that such a solution is ineffective.

On the other hand, is the proposal of a "common state" by Elinor Ostrom, which is well-known in economic literature. Here, the use of the environment, i. e. the common good consists in the existence of a negative feedback, i. e. a kind of homeostat. Thanks to this, e. g. the amount of CO₂ emissions to the atmosphere would be kept within certain limits.

"*Heimat and Habitat*" – the attachment to land and home, strict observance of tradition, respect for the dead, but also care for those who have not yet been born, are the leading problems of chapter seven. I think it is worthwhile to read this chapter, because the author writes a lot about the concept of oikophilia here, and the notion is characterized in the following wide and illustrative way: ... *the left and right should unite in the fight against consumerism to conclude an environmental alliance that would also heal the split in our civilization. When the critics of the ecological movement call it disrespectfully "nostalgia" or "technophobia", they are right – only that is not a criticism, but a real recognition of the thing we long for and which only awaits us to recover it if we are encouraged. This is oikophilia* (p. 234). Oikophilia perfectly corresponds to one of the principles of sustainable development, namely it is essential to combine fairly the developmental and environmental needs of present and future generations.

In the next (eighth) chapter, entitled "Beauty, Piety and Desecration" R. Scruton ponders on the relationship, or perhaps on feeling of beauty and the environment. Beauty encourages respect, and loving beauty should be an incentive for all environmental protection movements. Beauty is associated with taste, piety, aesthetics, natural devotion and respect for sacrum. Beauty, piety, aesthetics and sacrum "call" to save the environment from craving for exploitation and pollution. Is this possible? On a global scale, this is only possible if the interests of individual countries are pushed to the back.

In the ninth chapter entitled "Getting Nowhere" R. Scruton presents a picture of the world that is full of contradictions, the world that is incapable of agreeing and implementing any kind of environmental policy. The author shows, for example, the failure of Kyoto Protocol, international conferences (e.g. the conference in Copenhagen in 2009) and other consensus attempts. The author believes that the only way of saving from an environmental catastrophe is to abandon the belief in restrictive international treaties, to "profess" it individual countries do not have a strong incentive. So what to do? The author proposes that countries should pursue a policy that puts research and entrepreneurship above global regulations and control (p. 303).

"Begetting Somewhere" is quite a strange title of the tenth chapter. Only one issue has been chosen from the content of this chapter, namely the role of courts in contemporary social life. R. Scruton believes that the primary task of the courts is to settle disputes and not to formulate a policy of good governance of the community. Meanwhile, in the name of internationalist ideals, people are forced to observe these ideals. To prove the rightness of his thinking he gives two examples. The first concerns the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights, which has ruled that crosses in Italian schools are a violation of human rights and should be removed. The second example concerns Poland. R. Scruton criticized the European Commission's decision on the right to abortion. This right reflects the traditional identity of the Catholic population, but

the Commission has recognized that it should be amended in order to comply with the European Convention on Human Rights.

At the end of this chapter, the author returns to climate change, and develops this issue in the last, eleventh chapter of his book, entitled "Modest Proposals". In this chapter, once again the aim of conservative policy is set out, and then the author goes on to the evaluation of energy policy. He analyses the advantages and disadvantages of major energy sources in terms of CO₂ emissions. The author's deliberations can be summarized as follows: a climate catastrophe can be avoided by allocating huge funds spent on the study of climate change, under the auspices of the UN and the European Union on the research into energy sources that do not pollute the environment. This is not a matter of renewable (such as wind, solar or biomass energy) or nuclear energy, but it is about reliable, generally available and cheap energy. However, here the question arises whether the "mighty" of this world will be ready for such a gesture. At the end of the book there are two short appendices: "Global Justice" and "How should we Live", as well as a bibliography and a personal index.

To sum up, I would like to thank the publisher for making the book of R. Scruton available to the Polish reader. This can allow to see and understand the conservative approach to the environment. It turns out that this is a very different view from the revolutionary slogans of the Greens, which promote and impose an immediate change of lifestyle, and the abandonment of the existing values in the name of saving the planet from a global catastrophe. Conservatives want to achieve the same goal by promoting oikophilia, that is caring for the common good, for the home and its surroundings, for the family, for cultivating the memory of the deceased and for those who will be born. Conservatives are familiar with aesthetic impressions, beauty and culture. In their opinion, the role of the state should be to create conditions for oikophilia and motivate for it.

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