

Land Use Ethics  
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A RIGHT  
TO FREEDOM  
AND A DUTY  
TO BUILD BACK BETTER

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*"All those who are struggling for freedom today are ultimately fighting for beauty."*

— Albert Camus

Dear Professor Davy, you asked us to write this meditation as something, which should come from our hearts.

Since 24.02 my life changed forever, as the rockets flew on my beloved and peaceful homeland. Since then, unimaginable anxiety and hatred are spreading into every corner of my heart. It means, if I am honest, that no such meditation is possible for me right now, which doesn't include constant thoughts of the immense suffering of my people and destruction of my favourite cities, which are burning to the ground, while my soul is trapped inside.

Now, what does it have to do with land use ethics, some may ask.

It all started with the imperialistic ambitions of one small man with a big ego, who looked at Ukraine and had a simple thought: "It's mine". Needless to say, such a thought contradicts completely the knowledge of people, who are actually living on that land, no matter what exactly a small man really means by it. Did he think: "These are my cities, my houses, my hectares of the rich fields, my land with all of its useful resources"? Or did he rather mean: "These are my people; we are the same and thus must be united. Their language sounds like mine, we have common cultural heritage"?

What is Ukraine? A piece of land with its resources or an old culture, language, tradition? In fact, there are multiple signs, that putin recognizes both aspects. Seizing the first and eliminating the second is his goal. Three days before the war, Russian television broadcasted his two-hour speech, an appeal to his people, which looked more like a list of a thousand reasons to invade Ukraine. There he explained similarities between Russian and Ukrainian people, promoted propaganda

about the non-existence of Ukrainian nation as such, told lies, that our people want to be "liberated" from the Nazis, NATO, the USA and other imaginary enemies he invented to justify his war crimes. On the other hand, our country is valuable for the riches of its earth. For decades it has been called a "breadbasket" of the Soviet Union. And now, on the territories, annexed 8 years ago, the occupants mine for coal with no respect to the ecosystems and use it for their purposes. Just recently they also started to massively cut out our ancient forests in the North of Ukraine.

All of these arguments show, that a simple piece of land has both a physical and a spiritual aspect, just like Marylin Strathern stated in her Oxford Amnesty Lecture "Land: Intangible or Tangible Property?" Such a hypothesis leads the reader to another beautiful quote, which is now presented in one of your posters from 2009.



*“To think about land rights at once enlarges and diminishes whatever we might wish to say about human rights”*

— Marilyn Strathern

I not only understand it with my head but since recently feel it in my heart, that this sentence is completely true. As I started to think about our war through the prism of land use rights, I felt so right and so wrong at the same time. For example, if I deny Putin his right to own Ukraine, even though we know that all land on earth should belong to all people, am I allowed to say “OUR forests”, “MY city”, “get out of MY beloved Ukraine”? Who gave me the right to such ownership? Is it right to welcome refugees from all over the world, while denying Russian citizens entry? Is it right to kill for the sake of freedom? Is it right to ask NATO to intervene and protect our homes, while brave Ukrainian soldiers fight for freedom and other European values? Would it be ethical in regard to minorities in the East of Ukraine to deny them their wish to be a part of Russia, because the majority wants to stay in Ukraine? My heart would rather answer “yes” to all of these questions, and as a result, I feel like in the light, or rather in the darkness of the current events, I am turning into a miserable monster myself, because such an answer leaves a trace of doubt and diminishes much of what I have to say about human rights. It diminishes my belief, that all people are the citizens of the world and should have unrestricted possibilities to move freely on the whole surface of our planet. It shatters my conviction, that the opinions of the minorities have to be respected. It even devalues the most important Commandment of God: *“Do not kill”*.

On the opposite side, the fearless fight for our land enlarges our belief in human rights to a degree, that it becomes our essence. Brave Ukrainian people suddenly discovered in themselves an ability and even a duty to sacrifice their lives for the most sacred of all rights – freedom. They’d rather die as free people than live in a cage under Russian rule.

And under “Russian rule” I don’t mean that there is something wrong with allowing peaceful Russian people to come and settle here if they wish. With Russian rule, I mean in particular their corrupt authorities, who humiliate the ideas of democracy, freedom of expression and every basic of human rights. I will not go into detail here. To describe all atrocities of the Russian regime, 2500 words would not be enough. Books have been written about it and most recently, the records of war crimes, committed during the last month can be found on the tables of the lawyers in Hague.

As an excuse to deny certain people rights to our land I can say, that it’s a common practice, to isolate psychopaths, to imprison killers, to prevent criminals from doing even more harm. In a civilized world, everyone agrees, that sometimes such means are necessary to protect the common good. Never forget, that Ukrainians are not only fighting for their land, but also for the common good and everything that we call “European values”, even though such appropriation of values is very Eurocentric and shouldn’t be encouraged. We will not fall and we will not allow Russian expansion into other peaceful countries. Nowadays we can feel great support even from so-called neutral countries, which can’t and shouldn’t stay silent while injustice is happening. In my opinion, those who shouted “Never again!” after WWII, have no moral right to stay silent, when it is happening again.

It is right to want to stop the aggressor at all costs. It is right, to not let them destroy our homes, lives and democracy, even if we have to use weapons for it. After all, we have never stolen even a bit of their land, never killed their civilians, we’re merely protecting ours. This thought and the fact, that the whole world supports us, gives me great strength and shows that we are on the right path, even though our hands got dirty.

Sadly, but true, authoritarian regimes and the common people (who maybe have nothing at all to do with this war) tend to represent their country very disproportionately. Who has all the power over important decisions – has the

power over the land, including its people, resources, even culture and truth. That's how putin became Russia and Russia became putin. People's protests have little value, as they are being brutally silenced. After decades of oppression, they no longer have the ability to represent their country. The whole power is concentrated in the hands of the few. If we believe in the rule of people, such madness should not be allowed to spread into the countries who not yet suffer from authoritarianism.

Tragedies of today make me think about tomorrow. I understand that when I finish my studies, gain professional experience, my abilities will be very valued in Ukraine as there is much to be rebuilt.

So how do we build back better, for the people and environment? How can we avoid wars in the first place? How do we prevent one person from gaining too much power over the land and people?



*The patrimony of the poor man lies in the strength and dexterity of his hands; and to hinder him from employing his strength and dexterity in what manner he thinks proper without injury to his neighbour, is a plain violation of this most sacred property.*

— Adam Smith

Redmond, B. (2011). *Business and Society*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon. (2011). *Business and Society*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon. (2011). *Business and Society*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

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The second poster is all about the empowerment of common people. Just give them the right space and tools to act depending on their best knowledge and abilities, adjust and simplify the policies accordingly – and they will work for the wellbeing of their nation, turning lifeless grey neighborhoods into vibrant and diverse spaces for trade, creation, self-expression and communication. Sharing ideas, broadening networks and bottom-up development have always been important components of the free world. Empowered citizens, when they have all of their basic needs met and can live their life in dignity, are less likely to fall under the rule of oppression, than poor, miserable people, who are too busy looking for means to feed their families and don't pay attention to what is happening on the political arena.

Adam Smith was a Scottish economist and moral philosopher, and his series of books “An inquiry into the nature and causes of the wealth of nations” laid the foundation of classical economics and free trade. Not only did he recognize the working class as the main pillar of a nation's wellbeing and stated the importance of them having decent wages and conditions, but he also rooted for establishing a strong local economy to secure stability. Nowadays we also know it to be an eco-friendlier solution in comparison to economies with long supply chains, even though modern free trade often undermines the vision of its founder.

In addition, in the third tome of this series of books, Smith harshly criticised those who act purely out of self-interest and greed, encouraged his readers to act for the common good and strongly despised wars (in particular

he used the fall of the Roman Empire as an example), as something which “...interrupted the commerce between the towns and the country. The towns were deserted, and the country was left uncultivated, and the western provinces of Europe, which had enjoyed a considerable degree of opulence under the Roman empire, sunk into the lowest state of poverty and barbarism.” Again, the most important part of the quote on the poster is “without injury to the neighbor”.

Another important point, that I want to emphasize, is governmental control. Adam Smith attacked most forms of government interference in the economic process, saying that they hinder economic prosperity and people’s freedom. Of course, some basic regulations must always be imposed to not turn our world into chaos, but the power of government should not be absolute. Yes, the books of Adam Smith are about the economy, but we can extend this idea to urban planning too. In fact, many famous economists can’t touch on important subjects of commerce and rights without mentioning land use. And the other way round, no urban transformation can take place without the consideration of its economic and social aspects. So, in addition to Adam Smith’s teachings, let me draw attention to an icon of every good urbanist, who was obsessed with empowering common people – Jane Jacobs. She said: “*Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody.*” She agreed, that when the citizens become designers of their neighborhoods, embracing bottom-up initiatives, they also become masters of their lives.

However, on the road to empowerment lies an important, uncomfortable, but unavoidable milestone – contrition and realization of our own (previous) ignorance, incompetence and covetousness.

I chose the poster, which introduces a quote of a prominent economist, a fighter for social and

environmental justice, animal welfare and circular economy, Johann Heinrich von Thünen to be the third one.



“We have to be strong enough to unlearn what we know. Only then shall we be able to recognize as true what entirely contradicts our own mistakes”

— Johann Heinrich von Thünen

In his book „Der Isolierte Staat in Beziehung auf Landwirtschaft und Nationalökonomie“, he also harshly criticized “*egoistische, nach Glanz, Ehre und Genuss strebende Character, ohne Ahndung und Achtung des höheren Menschen und ohne Wahrheit*“, because of which “*unsere Zivilisation den Weg in die Selbstverbrennung aus Gier, aus Dummheit und vor allem aus Versehen [geht]*”.

Thinking of people belonging to the land, rather than thinking of land belonging to people is an ancient aboriginal concept, which we have to readopt. Fulfilling our duties to the next generations means treating land and its resources, animals, nature with respect. Ukrainians are spilling their blood to have

another chance to be better at this. Can Putin say the same?

Building back better for all requires rethinking our values, realizing our previous mistakes and even overturning some systems, which restrict people's creative actions. Scientists and some politicians agree, that "business as usual" makes it impossible to prevent further wars and climate catastrophe. Tiresome and extensive work on all levels and in all fields is needed. To some, it may sound like an impossible task, because it would mean changing our own perception of the world and our lifestyle. These discussions are not new

and have been happening for decades before the recent war. We had so many problems to solve and didn't understand that we were just happy people. Now Ukrainians realize it better than ever – every problem can be solved, however difficult it is, when we have a peaceful sky over our head. Working hard for the wellbeing of our land without having to constantly look out for falling rockets – what a blessing it would be! But we won't go back to "business as usual", we will work to create a future, where there is no place for inhumane catastrophes – no matter if they are of human or natural genesis. We will never be the same.

*"Accepting the absurdity of everything around us is one step, a necessary experience: it should not become a dead end. It arouses a revolt that can become fruitful."*

— Albert Camus

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