

Forest Time and the Passions of Economic Man

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Troubled Times

Our current moment of escalating degradation of the natural world and at best partial understanding of the dangers building up in the earth system destabilizes many of the languages we have for organizing and making sense of our lives and activities in time. One of the characteristics of this crisis is that it activates new timescales, particularly long-term timescales, often on different orders of magnitude compared to the ones that have been current in political and social institutions.¹ In matters of climate change, nuclear waste, and species extinction, the timescales at play range from tens of thousands years into eternity.² The tools we have for addressing them remain within the short-term however, such as legislatures and economic cycles. One of the challenges facing our societies seems to be whether we can reconstruct our political and economic systems and institutional frameworks so that they are able to encompass the kinds of timescales at play in the natural world and earth system, and thereby match the temporal reach of our technological, scientific, and industrial agency, and the aggregated effects of our societies' extractive and consuming behaviors. At the heart of this issue is the question of whether it is possible to extend the sense of connection, community, and responsibility in time and construct institutions that can responsibly govern times not only beyond the current election cycle, but beyond the present generation, times that reach into a deep future.

This problem appears in different versions in different academic disciplines. For example, philosophers have discussed the tyranny of the present as a kind of construction defect in democracy, and economists have used the concept of discounting to monetize the rate at which our bond to future people fades with temporal distance.³ Increasingly, this problem has also become of

interest for historians. For example, the works of Michelle Bastian, Duncan Kelly, and Deborah Coen convincingly demonstrate that how the problem of reconciling timescales has appeared in different historical contexts may inform our own historical moment. As it turns out, the problem of temporal disconnect has a history.⁴

The challenge of making the times of nature connect with political and economic time frames has been an important aspect of concrete political questions and has been recognized as such by actors in the past. This chapter takes us to one such context, namely the political struggle over the forest in early nineteenth century France, more specifically the debates preceding a new comprehensive forest legislation in 1827. These debates dealt explicitly with how the emerging economic and political time frames could be reconciled with the intrinsic long-term temporality of the forest. Interestingly for our purposes, this problem of reconciling clashing temporalities played out in part as a question of human emotions.

The French Forest Code of 1827

In the 1820s, the French forests were at a low point, both in terms of the surface they covered, and the condition they were in.⁵ There had long been calls for a new forest legislation, and in 1827 such a law was passed. The 1827 Forest Code is generally regarded as a compromise between the state and private landowners at the expense of the peasant population who lost their long-established use rights to the forest. Traditional practices essential to rural populations' life support, such as collection of wood for fuel and grazing of cattle (often goats), were outlawed. All usages of the forest were now regulated by the law, enforced in the courts, and all forests belonging to the crown, the state, or the communes were put under the control of forest administration.⁶

The Forest Code is a prime example of how the history of the politics of nature as a resource is also social history. It represents an important step in the shift away from a relationship between society and nature in which the commons played a central role. In France, this was not a peaceful shift. John Merriman argues that the Forest Code of 1827 was part of a "significant social, economic, and political crisis in France that lasted from 1827 to 1832." And even if "the combination of a developing rural capitalism and a centralized, bureaucratic state, which protected and sponsored it, was winning its struggle with the French peasantry," that winning indeed took a struggle. The crisis sparked grain riots, tax rebellions, and, importantly, several revolts in forests around the country.⁷ Most famous of these was the so-called *guerre des demoiselles* in the region of Ariège on the Spanish border where, as described in official reports, "groups of armed men, disguised as women," their faces

painted in red and black, took to defending their traditional rights to the forest by threats and violence against forest guards and charcoal makers.⁸

The Forest Code was an important step in the introduction of rural capitalism, and the forcible integration of the peasant population into the new economy.⁹ This conflict was articulated in the parliamentary debates preceding the passing of the new legislation, but it did not dominate it. In the National Assembly, the principal conflict was instead to what extent the state should be able to overrule the private land owners' property rights. Property rights were held high in the discussions, but the concern for the degrading conditions of the forests in the country and the supply of wood for the navy motivated the imposition of a twenty-year moratorium on the clearing of private forests, and a reinstatement of the old prerogative of the navy to purchase timber from private woodlands when deemed necessary. Apart from these two measures, the code reinforced the rights of private land owners.¹⁰ But the Forest Code debates were about other things as well: not least, what the presumptions of the new liberal economic language were; what that language said about human nature and passions; and how this played out when a temporally idiosyncratic piece of nature was to be turned into a commodity. Also, just like all attempts to manage forests, the political project of creating a new forest legislation in 1827 confronted the politicians involved in it with the temporal otherness of trees.

Time of the Forest, Time of the Market

In the nineteenth century, as in previous ones, the glory and might of the French nation depended on a group of species that took its time. Trees—wood and timber—were a fundamental resource for France's military power, for private land owners, and the expanding iron industry.¹¹ Acutely, the forest was also a cornerstone in the life support of the peasant population, who used it for food, fuel, construction material, and pasturage. But trees were also the source of valuable symbolic power. Trees' incarnation of stability and endurance, their extension in time and transcendence of generations and centuries, their embodiment of a present rooted in the past and the projection of organic growth into the future may have been the reason for the delight in all things arboreal among French royalties of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. One of the more spectacular instances of this was the night in late February of 1745, when the French king Louis XV showed up at a ball to celebrate the marriage between his son the Dauphin of France and Maria Theresa, Infanta of Spain, dressed as a pruned yew tree. (This was also the night when the king met his future advisor and lover, Madame de Pompadour).¹² And as the old regime had tapped into the temporal otherness of trees to gain symbolic

power, so did the new. With the revolution came an intensified need for practices and symbols that created legitimacy for the new political system, and projected its reach into the future. The revolutionaries cultivated a practice of planting “trees of liberty” at numerous places in the republic (some of them are still standing), and this practice was revived later, for example by the revolutionaries of 1848.¹³

Time is central to politics as an activity and mode of communal life, and doing politics is always a matter of governing time.¹⁴ In politics concerned with the forest, this dimension is particularly present, given the forest’s own transgenerational temporality that often disturbs or resists political temporal frameworks. Many of the trees that were most precious for human activities took centuries to reach the desired dimensions. Oaks for example, needed to stand for at least two hundred and fifty years.¹⁵ The government of the forest as a resource meant to govern long timescales stretching over several generations. Against the sylvan longevity stood another temporality that had entered the minds and plans of the bourgeois and aristocratic men that made up the National Assembly, namely the temporality of the market. At this time, new theories put forward that the economic liberty of individuals was the most effective way of engendering riches in a country. In *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776) Adam Smith had famously argued that society as a whole would benefit if individuals were allowed to freely pursue their own economic interests. As a consequence, the market place, and by extension society as a whole, would spontaneously and benignly self-organize. Following historians of the subject, I refer to this idea as spontaneous order.¹⁶ French liberals picked up on these ideas, especially the aspect of a strong protection of private property, which had ardent advocates in the National Assembly. Important to the purposes of this book, spontaneous order is also a type of temporality, one in which the aggregated unrestricted behavior of individuals replaces direct steering and planning. The dynamics of the market promise a future of balance in resource supply and order, if only private property and economic liberty are protected in the present.

The new ideas of spontaneous order and economic liberty that emerged out of the Scottish Enlightenment was a language of abstraction that equalized all phenomena and processes. But in the French National Assembly, everyone did not find this equalization entirely convincing. One of the central questions in the debates on the Forest Code was precisely whether the benign dynamics of spontaneous order was operable in the case of all commodities and resources, and in all areas of society and economy. More specifically, would it work in the case of the forest? The crucial factor that many feared could disturb the dynamics of spontaneous order was time. Did freedom of property really produce a stable future supply of a resource with such extraordinary

temporal characteristics? Could individual land owners handle the timescales at play in the forest?

The refusal to take the specificities of the natural world into account was in effect one of the core characteristics of the new economic language of spontaneous order. As several historians of economic thought have drawn attention to, classical political economy seems early on to have rejected taking the restraints and limits of nature and the organic economy as its starting point. This is part of its break with earlier economic schools of thought such as the physiocrats, who built on the idea of agriculture as the sole genuinely productive factor, and are generally regarded as a cul-de-sac in a tradition of thought whose future supposedly lay in the theorizing of labor and industry.¹⁷ Questions of limits were glaringly absent from the emerging new and powerful language of political economy. It is indeed ironic, Paul Warde argues, that the “photosynthetic constraints” of the organic economy played no role in this emerging body of thought: “classical political economy emerged precisely at the time when such limits were first becoming a matter of concern—and yet barely considered them.”¹⁸ The forest is a case in point. Emblematically, Adam Smith saw no reason to conceptualize wood in any different way than other commodities.¹⁹ In contrast, Fredrik Albritton Jonsson argues that during the very same period the forest came to play a central and morally charged role for Scottish elites and natural historians as they discovered deforestation in the eighteenth century—hundreds of years after most of it happened. The loss of forests was interpreted as a moral failure as well as the cause of several of Scotland’s problems including its rough climate, and wood was therefore a commodity of a specific patriotic and moral importance. As natural history and the emerging classical political economy parted ways, the forest question ended up on the side of natural history. Moreover, the forest was key in that very process of partition: “the anxiety about forest clearance thus served as a wedge that helped drive apart the enlightened sciences of natural history and classical political economy.” This meant that “the same social and political forces that mobilized Scottish elites around the problem of deforestation rendered it invisible in Smith’s *Wealth of Nations*.”²⁰

The emerging classical political economy was a language of abstraction, which disregarded intrinsic characteristics of natural and organic phenomena. In France however, this abstraction was met with skepticism from different directions. As we will see, Smith’s most important disseminator in France, Jean-Baptiste Say (1767–1832), was not convinced by the exclusive focus on (human) labor as a productive force in Smith’s theory, and the blindness for the value created by nature.²¹ But Say also expressed skepticism towards what we might call Adam Smith’s anthropology, his understanding of human nature and human motivation. The idea that trees could fit easily into a market

model also met with suspicion in the National Assembly. Several deputies expressed concerns over the roles played by trees and forests beyond that of a resource: the forest filled sanitary and aesthetic functions, and it was also a stabilizing environmental factor, both as a protection against erosion and to maintain a favorable climate. Most interesting for our purposes however, was the temporal critique that different deputies articulated against the language of spontaneous order as applied to trees. Detailed concerns were raised over the operation of abstracting different timescales and subjecting them to the same market dynamic. These concerns were articulated with an eye to the specific long-term timescales of trees, but first and foremost targeted the particular understanding of driving forces of humans that underpinned the idea of market-induced spontaneous order. In other words, the question of time, the clashing temporalities of forest time and the time of the market, played out as a question of human emotions.

Emotions in History

For scholars in the humanities and social sciences, emotions have emerged as an important theme in relation to problems of climate change. Psychologists, behavioral economists, philosophers, and others have explained the lack of adequate responses to the knowledge of climate change in terms of human emotional responsiveness, psychology, or even nature.²² Emotions have played a central role in scholarly discussions of the spectrum of climate change denial.²³ Academics have examined the role of fear and alarm, and the effects of psychological distancing mechanisms and other affective misfires in reaction to information about climate change.²⁴ The interest in emotions can be seen as a reaction to decades of focus on reason and rational deliberation as the basis for democracy and political behavior. This reaction has led to a revival in political theory of ancient questions of whether reason and emotions are to be understood as opposites, or on the contrary as intertwined and perhaps inseparable.²⁵

Just like time, emotions have a history. The inquiry into the history of emotions rests on the idea that at least some aspect of our emotional life is dependent on culture, and thus subject to historical change.²⁶ This has proven a fruitful perspective not least for the study of political life in the past, and historians have explored such aspects as the style, expression, intensity, and role of emotions in different political contexts.²⁷ As I have already hinted at, human emotions play a central role in the early nineteenth century debates about the French forests. Here, I suggest that the most pertinent perspective is not to focus on the rhetorical use of emotions in the debates, and what

that might mean, but rather to concentrate on the theories and ideas about emotions that were articulated and used in the debates.

As discussed, Adam Smith's new language of spontaneous order had entailed a simplification, which disregarded the specificities of the natural world. But it was not just the conception of nature that was simplified in this way, simplification also applied to a pre-existing nuanced language for the dynamics of human driving forces and motivations in social life. In a now classic book, Albert O. Hirschman traces the rather intricate history of this tradition, a sprawling but influential set of political problems that originated in a sixteenth-century reflection on statecraft. Two Renaissance ideas were of importance here: first, that disorderly human passions could be managed successfully only by a careful direction of other passions to countervail them²⁸; second, the doctrine of the *ragione di stato* that the prince's person embodied the interest of the state.²⁹ During at least two centuries, philosophers combined elements of these two lines of thought and developed a vocabulary that opposed human passions to human interests. Successively and by twists and turns, the sin formerly known as avarice was rebranded as interest, and turned into something that was not only accepted but thought of as a benign force that could be deployed to hold back other, worse, passions.³⁰ Societal order could be achieved by letting money-making as a calculating and rational motivation keep in check other possibly incendiary and chaotic passions, such as the pursuit of glory or pleasure. This particular line of thought came to an end with Adam Smith, Hirschman argues.³¹ In *The Wealth of Nations* Smith abandoned the distinction and dynamic between the passions and the interest, and instead constructed his economic theory around one sole human driving force: the "desire of bettering [one's] condition" by "an augmentation of fortune." By amalgamating interest and passions, Smith short-circuited the counter-weight tradition and thereby reconfigured the semantic field around these issues. For him, all passions and drivers of human action could be channeled and expressed through private acquisitive interest, which is a particularly calm and societally benign driving force that should—famously—be embraced and liberated.³² Emma Rothschild argues for a similar interpretation of this aspect of Smith: for him, commercial judgment was a faculty that amalgamated reason and sentiment, nourished by the warm feeling of self-interest or self-love.³³

But Adam Smith certainly did not settle the question of the passions and the interest once and for all. In the French debates on the forest legislation of 1827, the nature of that "desire of bettering [one's] condition" was a profoundly contested question. Also, with the new ideas on economic liberty that emerged by the late eighteenth century, the question of human character as a decisive factor in politics was no longer a matter of only the passions

and interests of those in power, but it became an issue concerning people in general.³⁴ In the French forest debates of 1827, the issues of what kind of driving force the pursuit of economic gain really was, and how it affected the community, were issues very much under contestation.

The Pursuit of Material Gain, a Hot or a Cold Passion?

As mentioned, the Forest Code overruled the freedom of private property by two measures, first by imposing a twenty-year moratorium on land owners' right to freely clear their forests, and second by giving the navy the first right to select and buy timber from private sellers.³⁵ The dominating argument for these measures was that private forest owners were unreliable suppliers of timber of mature age. In the parliamentary debates, private land owners were frequently depicted as easy prey to uncontrolled impulses and temptations. Xavier Chifflet, ultraroyalist and member of the Chamber of Deputies' committee on the Code, lashed out against the liberty of the property owners as the cause of the wood scarcity currently plaguing France.³⁶ The property owners had misused their freedom, he argued, "they have abused it with an excess that has been fatal to the public interest, by carelessness, by false speculations, by this greedy haste to pleasure that characterizes our time."³⁷ Another deputy talked about a "clearing mania" that had stricken forest owners in the country.³⁸ The pursuit of private gain was identified not only as the cause of the current state of the French forests, this pursuit was also talked about as a stormy passion overwhelming individuals. The feelings surrounding private property were also rendered as potentially destabilizing politically. The conservative deputy Rey de Saint-Géry depicted these sentiments as ambiguous, and susceptible to easy political tricks: "nothing is easier than to strike a chord as sensible as the love and independence of property; nothing is sweeter to man than the possibility to do what pleases him, and nothing appears more difficult to him than to be disturbed in the use of his property."³⁹ But to live in a society, he explains, one must suppress, or at least harness, such feelings.

Against the image of tormented land owners unable to resist the desire for quick profit, other deputies defended the sanctity of private property by painting its emotional underpinnings in very different colors. Horace François Bastien Sébastiani—former general in Napoleon's army, and soon to become minister in the bourgeois July monarchy that followed on the July revolution in 1830—argued that the premature felling of trees only emerged out of a state disturbance of private owners' natural instincts. If left to his own judgment, the land owner would be guided by his paternal instincts that would make him see ahead and let his trees stand to grow tall. His motivation for this was the future material benefit of his children. It was on these grounds that Sébastiani

opposed all restrictions on the land owner's right to do as he pleased with his forests. "Why," Sébastiani rhetorically interrogated his peers: "do you assume that he has such lack of foresight for his children? Have more confidence in his paternal solicitude, and watchfulness."⁴⁰ The problem that today's philosophers sometimes refer to as intergenerational buck passing, the temptation to leave environmental costs and problems to future people, could in Sébastiani's eyes be avoided by keeping the generational bond private: nobody would deprive his own children of wealth and property for his own good.⁴¹

For Sébastiani, the good society was a calm society in which individuals could plan for their families and property. Politically, this calmness was achieved simply by not governing and not administering, since it is "by wanting to govern too much that [the government] lets this inconvenient multitude of laws gush," and it was "by stirring up itself that the government stirs up society." Such agitation in turn destroyed the calm and preserving force of private interest: "by wanting to over-administrate, [the government] penetrates into the lives of the families and substitutes the interest of the private individuals."⁴² Sébastiani defended a position close to the one defended by Edmund Burke in *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790): that private property and especially the transfer of that property across generations in the form of inheritance constituted an essential cohesive and stabilizing force in a society.⁴³ The freely pursued material interest was here imagined to produce order and tranquility in society. Purposefully or not, Sébastiani tapped into a tradition of conceptualizing the desire for wealth as a particularly calm passion, characterized by its calculation and rationality, and thus having a stabilizing effect on society in the long term.⁴⁴ The deputy de Saint-Géry expressed a similar view: private property must be protected from state interference in order to safeguard his natural propensity for foresight, "with which an individual naturally complies, when he wishes to put his affairs in order."⁴⁵ For de Saint-Géry, Sébastiani, and others like them, individuals were calculating and farsighted, if only left to their own devices, and private property thus had an orderly influence, cooling the heads of men.

In the debate, the differing views on what status private property should have in society seems closely intertwined with the question of what kind of passion the pursuit of material interest really is. What forces drive and structure individuals' economic behavior? Under the surface of the Forest Code debate brewed the question of whether the pursuit of private gain is, so to speak, a hot or a cold passion. Is it an incendiary drive that takes over man and makes him act blindly; or is it a cooling force, composing man and making him calculate and see clearly. The question has a distinct temporal component: does material interest render man farsighted and prone to planning, or wildly rapacious and blind for anything beyond immediate satisfaction? This problem greatly worried many of the participants in the debates: how

would an individual land owner typically understand and act when left to plan his own future, thereby unknowingly deciding the future of the nation as a whole. Many deputies expressed a fear that individual land owners would be blinded by a desire for quick economic gain, and thereby cause severe problems for the country—if not its outright ruin. The question of whether material interest was a wild passion or a cool and calculating mode, whether it made men shortsighted or planning, informed the conflict over the liberal idea of spontaneous order, that individual material interest would somehow merge into a greater good on a societal level.

The Qualities of Passionate Time

The language of passions was also permeating the report on the Forest Code crafted by the special parliamentary committee charged with examining it. In a long historical overview of the forest legislation in France the report argued that the crucial mistake over the decades had been to believe that the land owner's "interest is a guide that will not lead him astray: he will not tear up his trees unless with the hope of a better product." Experience had now proven this idea wrong, the report stated, and it has instead turned out that "the hope of increased revenues has thrown many forest owners into the clearing mania." Stricken with this mania, land owners had logged forests without informing themselves properly and "without checking the nature and position of the soil," with the result that not even "trees sitting on mountain slopes have escaped this kind of legal devastation." The consequences had been ruinous, the committee argued: fertile soil had eroded in many areas, and land owners "have seen their property, which not long ago was productive, *suddenly* stricken with *eternal* barrenness."⁴⁶

The committee in this way depicted the land owners' miscalculated shortsightedness as caused by a failure to keep the passions in check. The wording suggests a rapacious material motivation, a voluptuous shortsightedness to which a moment of surrender results in a destruction from which there is no turning back. The question of time is here a matter of government of the passions, and forest time appears as an almost insurmountable challenge to human self-control. Further, the passage paints a striking contrast between the suddenness with which the land is changed, and the eternity of devastation. It suggests a temporal quality in which the short and the long term are connected in a specific way. Moments unfold into eternities, and abrupt outbursts of human greed can cause irreparable and infinite damage to the natural processes that guarantee that humans can support themselves, that societies can prevail and prosper.

The argument that the management of forest time, as intergenerational and fragile, cannot be entrusted to individual property owners and their material

driving forces suggests a conception of long-term forest time as something qualitatively different from short-term time as opposed to just more of it. Forest time is not just many short time spans added up, but qualitatively specific, intrinsically long-term time. Forest time is nonscalable in Anna Tsing's sense of the term. In her vocabulary, the concept of scalability denotes the possibility to "change scales smoothly without any change in project frames."⁴⁷ For Tsing, expansion through scalability has been a prominent feature of capitalist modernization.⁴⁸ This is certainly also true in terms of temporality. Market time is scalable in that it can be expanded without adjustment of any of the mechanisms that govern it. The temporality of spontaneous order presupposes scalable and linear time, one in which the market governs all commodities in the same way, whether they take a day or a century to produce. In contrast to this stands the kind of temporality that the parliamentary committee suggests, one in which a moment of folly can unleash an eternity of barrenness.

The Moratorium as Temporal Politics

To sugarcoat the meddling with private property, the Forest Code deployed a specific politics of time, namely a moratorium, a time-limited freeze of private land owners' clearing rights.⁴⁹ Arguing that the restrictions on property freedoms were only momentary, the parliamentary committee pointed to a future in which such measures would no longer be necessary, since the economic agents of the future would be better informed and have stronger self-control. Combined with the general progress in agricultural and technological methods, the practices of more virtuous and wise land owners would substantially decrease the pressure on the French forests. This "happy future" would bring "a better type of exploitation, better educated agents, reforestations executed with care and discernment, the abundance of our coal mines, the decrease in fuel use due to new processes, the construction of new canals and roads making possible a more equal distribution of our forest products; and finally, the ever growing progress in agriculture, arts and sciences."⁵⁰ The moratorium was used as a way of suspending the inviolability of private property without having to abandon it in principle. This principle was instead moved to the future: it would be put into practice when technological development and the characters of the land owners had sufficiently matured.

Not everyone in the National Assembly shared the fundamentally Enlightenment expectation that the sheer passing of time would bring not only technological advancement but also progress of mores and human character. The royalist deputy of Doubs, the marquis de Terrier-Santans, did for example argue along those lines that the devastation of the forests must be stopped, or else "we will see in this country, as in all others, the destruction of forests

march with civilization, and that the wood is inversely proportional to the needs of man; because the more industrious they are, the more they cut down, the more eager they become to seek pleasure.”⁵¹

The advancement of civilization risked coming at the prize of the devastation of nature, and this was due to the increasing desire for pleasure that rising industriousness brought about. In de Terrier-Santans’ view, civilization did not bring about a more well-tempered and farsighted character, but on the contrary fed a self-destructing insatiability. There was nothing calm about the pursuit of material advancement; on the contrary, it drew with it and fueled limitless pleasure seeking, and would not stop unless made to. De Terrier-Santans also raised the issue of the relationship between civilization and nature, which was yet another point of contestation in the Assembly. As a mirror image of de Terrier-Santans’s argument, Sébastiani held up the countries with the largest and most powerful fleets as examples to follow: “in England there are no forests anymore; and none in Holland. We have to admit, gentlemen, that the great forests are a certain sign of barbarity and poverty.” At this point, the parliamentary protocol reports murmur from the chamber. “As countries move forward in civilization they abandon the big woods and instead use isolated plantations that the cultivation of the soil and the fertilizers will quickly develop.”⁵² For Sébastiani progress simply meant ceasing to see the forest, and instead to start calculating the value of the trees.

Private Time, Common Time

The debates in the National Assembly in the 1820s were also a debate about the relation between particular and common interest, often expressed as a question about the proper role of the state vis-à-vis the freedoms of the individual, or about the real effects of monarchy. These themes are well covered in political and intellectual historiography, but the forest question adds a new dimension to this familiar territory, and rearranges its topography. Repeatedly, the deputies that debated the new Forest Code recognized that the dynamics between the private and the common interests had an important temporal dimension. The future and the long term were presented as analogous to the common interest, and the present and the short term to the individual interest. So did Antoine Bonnet de Lescure, for example, preface his discussion of the Code with the remark that all his comments would “have as their object the defense of the state against the private interests, and the needs of the future against those of the present.”⁵³ This trope was perhaps most elegantly turned by the baron du Teil, who put forward the notion that the present is private whereas the future is collective: “it is only with pain that the individuals sacrifice the present, which is entirely theirs, for a future, which is really

something only for the masses.”⁵⁴ Another iteration of the idea that forest temporality was to be understood as inalienably communal was expressed by the former minister Sylvère Gaye de Martignac, director general of the *Enregistrement* (the body responsible for collecting dues on properties owned by the state).⁵⁵ Addressing the issue of whether the forests owned as commons by the municipalities could be divided and shared among the inhabitants of the municipality in question—a procedure that had been practiced during the revolution—he made the case for transgenerational ownership as necessarily nonprivate: “the properties of the communes belong to the inhabitants of the commune, and not to the present generation. The generations following on each other are successively its usufructuaries: it is a perpetual replacement that should last as long as the commune. Consequently, none of the passing generations have the right to change this right and constitute itself as proprietor in its private authority.”⁵⁶

The minister of the navy, Christophe Chabrol de Crouzol, defended the navy’s prerogative to overrule private land owners’ rights to sell to whoever they wanted. He held that only the king and nobility could in effect be farsighted enough to plant and care for forests, and thus effectively exercise concern for the future. Since the revolution, shortsightedness had reigned. Chabrol continued by identifying the calculations of profit as a force that overtakes all other motivations and “have entered even the projects of embellishment and pleasure. Only trees that are expected to be cut are planted, and pleasure is taken, as it were, in disinheriting those who come after us.” For Chabrol, the calculated pursuit of material interest was opposed to other human sensibilities, such as prudence and the aesthetic appreciation of beauty. The individual calculating mode did not aggregate a farsighted and spontaneously ordered temporality, but was precisely the force that leads to devastation. In a language that mixed spatial and temporal images, Chabrol advanced the view that small-scale private forest owners could not generate a common good and a prosperous future for the nation by following their own interests and private temporalities: “one does not look into the future, because everyone traces a circle for himself, and makes it as narrow as possible.”⁵⁷ As discussed, this view did not go uncontested: deputies like Sébastiani on the contrary held that responsibility for the future and the long term could only spring from private considerations.

Jean-Baptiste Say’s Rare Exceptions

We have seen above that several deputies, and the parliamentary committee charged with the Forest Code, expressed the view that the failure to control one’s own passion for material gain caused individuals to be shortsighted

and miscalculate their own interests—or to calculate them correctly but to the detriment of the community. This fear also caused headaches beyond Parliament, not least for the well-known economic thinker Jean-Baptiste Say. The first professor of political economy at the *Collège de France*, Say was equally a businessman, a foreign member of the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, and a prolific writer, and he is today held by many to be the most prominent French classical political economist.⁵⁸ Say was an early reader of Adam Smith, and introduced many of his economic ideas in France. Like Smith, Say believed that the dynamics of the market could by itself create beneficial outcomes for society as a whole, and it was therefore important to guarantee economic freedom and protection of private property. Yet, Say was not an uncritical disseminator of Smith's economic theories. In contrast to Adam Smith's sole focus on labor as a generator of value, Jean-Baptiste Say repeatedly underlined the productive role played by nature in society and the economy: "when one tears down a tree, nature's spontaneous product, does not society then acquire a product superior to what only the industry of the woodcutter can produce?"⁵⁹

Further, Say did not believe that private property should be protected in all situations, but that there were cases when it was beneficial for the state to interfere in the relation between an individual and his property. In his 1826 fifth edition of the *Traité d'économie politique*, published a year before the Forest Code was passed in the National Assembly, Say listed a number of such exceptions to the otherwise fundamental principle of the inviolability of private property. Strikingly, one of the "excessively rare" cases Say brought up was forest management. Why forests? The reason Say gave was the important functions forests filled for societies: "the necessity to provide society with timber for the navy or wood that it cannot do without, makes regulations of clearings of private forests tolerable."⁶⁰ Because of their vital role for society, the government of forests could not be completely left to the individual land owner's calculated interest. But it is not convincing that the central role of wood for the national economy was the only reason for Say to exempt silviculture from his otherwise liberal economic principles. Other goods and resources played a similar essential role in the economy—grain for example—but are not on his list of exceptions. The next case on his list concerned mining, and it might give us a clue about the principal rationale behind the exceptions. Say argued that it is beneficial for the state to interfere with private property in cases when a land owner deploys mining methods on his property that exploit shallow reserves in a way that makes it impossible to later reach deeper lying and possibly more valuable findings.⁶¹ Say described this type of miscalculation as being triggered by "an overly impatient greed."⁶² Crucially, Say here pointed to weakness in character and deficiency in moral stamina and self-control as motivating state meddling with private land. It is

plausible that this kind of human weakness is the underlying problem that Say is addressing by providing exceptional restrictions to the principle of property rights. In fact, the third of Say's three examples also points to inadequate character as the implicit risk that state interference should hold back.⁶³ Difficult to digest for a modern reader, Say's third exception concerns slavery, in which case he argues that: "in the countries that recognize the unfortunate right of man on man, a right that harms all others, certain limits are nonetheless posed to the power of the master over the slave."⁶⁴ In 1826, France was again among the countries recognizing that "unfortunate right," allowing racialized enslavement of humans in its Caribbean colonies.⁶⁵ This case is vexing, and would alone deserve extensive discussion that cannot be provided here. But seen in the light of Say's position on slavery and engagement in the abolitionist movement, this case of legitimate state interference could be understood as pointing in the same direction as the cases of silviculture and mining. A popular argument among those opposing slavery at the time was that it should be abolished because it was less profitable than free labor. Slavery was held up as a kind of miscalculation and an effect of an inefficient mercantile economic system.⁶⁶ This view—famously advocated by Adam Smith—did not convince Say, who in his *Traité* calculated that an enslaved worker was in fact more profitable than a free one, but that slavery should be abolished anyway because it was immoral.⁶⁷ For Say, the matter was "not only a question of at what price you can make a man work, but at what price you can make him work without offending justice and humanity."⁶⁸ The interaction between and effects of moral arguments and economic calculation in the long debate over French slavery is an intriguing question.⁶⁹ Here, I will however content myself with observing that Say's intervention in that debate reinforces the argument that for him, other values such as moral considerations or environmental functions might be at odds with economic interests. Therefore, not all desires and sentiments could in fact be channeled into material gain seeking, and thereby aggregated to produce a societal outcome for the benefit of all.

In line with this, I argue that the rationale behind Say's exceptions—including the case of the forest—is that there are limits to the human capacity of self-control and farsighted economic sentiments, and that this has to be reflected in the laws that regulate economic life. For Say, the protection of private property and principled liberty of economic activity were not sufficient to produce a benign outcome for society as a whole.⁷⁰ And the cause of this was the individual's flimsy capacity to navigate and control his own driving forces and desires. In the mining example, the landowner's freedom had to be circumscribed so that he did not give in to the "overly impatient greed."⁷¹ For Say, just as for some of the deputies in the National Assembly, economic agents were easily overtaken by their material desires. And again, this risk was amplified in the case of forests.

Further, in the light of other passages in the *Traité* where Say discussed wood, his defense of state control over sylvan matters could be interpreted as having to do with time. In one such passage, Say argued that trees have a specific advantage as economic assets in that the production of wood is “almost entirely the work of nature.” If the tree had only been planted, it would eventually reimburse man with “the treasure of its wood.” But there was one condition: “the tree asks of man only to be forgotten for some years.”⁷² Say described the challenge in managing this as a temptation: “one must not be tormented by desire to cut down [the tree].” It thus seems plausible that to forget the tree, in Say’s words, is a matter of virtue and resisting desires—just as in the mining example.⁷³ The virtue of forest management lies in the ability to adapt oneself to nature’s temporality, to willfully forget, wait, and let time do its job. In Say’s *Traité*, just as in many of the arguments presented in the National Assembly, the forest appears as a failed gigantic marshmallow test for economic men coming of age.

Emotional Temporalities

Today, the complexity and unprecedentedness of the climatological and ecological processes in motion pose an extraordinary challenge to us in terms of understanding them: how they are interconnected, what dimensions of human and societal life they concern, and the historical trajectories that brought them about. In this work, history can inform how we perceive and understand these problems, and thus, hopefully, how we formulate responses to them. The nineteenth-century discussions treated in this chapter show that the problem of reconciling clashing temporalities is not new. The challenge of how to connect the times of the natural world with political and economic times has a history of its own. In the past, the forest question confronted politicians and economists with a radically different timescale and temporality that forced them to articulate their view on whether the long term changed anything in the economic and political mechanics that structured society, whether their economic and political theories were temporally scalable or not. But not only that, the forest question was thematized as a problem that connected the question of time to that of human passions and character. What the 1820s debates reveal to us is that the question of how nature’s temporalities relate to cultural temporalities has been closely intertwined with the question of who the human is, what drives and moves her, what incites her to seek immediate satisfaction, or to organize her actions on a long timescale. The French parliamentarians from two hundred years ago offer us questions of how time and emotion relate to each other, and they propose and deliberate answers to those questions. Although the law that the National Assembly was debating

and passing was a hard blow on the peasant population and its often much gentler and sustainable uses of the forest as a commons, and although many of the deputies represented a worldview utterly alien to modern political sensibilities of meritocracy and equality before the law, the questions they posed, and the ways they turned the relationship between the temporalities of the market and the natural world in a language of human emotions constitute, I think, a lesson in how the reconciliation of times can be approached. A lesson that should interest us in our moment of ecological insecurity and danger.

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NOTES

1. Michelle Bastian, “Fatally Confused: Telling the Time in the Midst of Ecological Crises,” *Environmental Philosophy* 9, no. 1 (2012): 23–48; Bill McKibben, “Worried? Us?” *Granta* 83 (2003): 7–12; Deborah R. Coen, “Big is a Thing of the Past: Climate Change and Methodology in the History of Ideas,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 77, no. 2 (2016): 306–8.
2. Deborah B. Rose, Thom van Dooren, and Matthew Chrulew, “Telling Extinction Stories,” in *Extinction Studies: Stories of Time, Death, and Generations*, ed. Deborah B. Rose, Thom van Dooren, and Matthew Chrulew (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 8–10; Dipesh Chakrabarty, “Anthropocene Time,” *History and Theory* 57, no. 1 (2018): 22; Peter U. Clark et al., “Consequences of Twenty-First-Century Policy for Multi-Millennial Climate and Sea-Level Change,” *Nature Climate Change* 6, no. 4 (2016): 360–69.
3. Dale Jamieson, *Reason in a Dark Time: Why the Struggle Against Climate Change Failed and What It Means for Our Future* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2014), 132, and the chapter “The Limits of Economics,” 105–43.
4. Duncan Kelly, *Politics and the Anthropocene* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2019); Bastian, “Fatally Confused”; Coen, “Big is a Thing of the Past.”
5. Kieko Matteson, *Forests in Revolutionary France: Conservation, Community, and Conflict, 1669–1848* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 159.
6. John M. Merriman, *History on the Margins: People and Places in the Emergence of Modern France* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2018), 4.
7. Merriman, *History on the Margins*, 2.
8. Merriman, 7–8; Peter Sahlins, *Forest Rites: The War of the Demoiselles in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), ix.

9. Merriman, *History on the Margins*, 2.
10. Merriman, 197; Sahlins, *Forest Rites*, 18–19; Curtis Sarles, “The Instatement of Order: State Initiatives and Hegemony in the Modernization of French Forest Policy,” *Theory and Society* 35, no. 5/6 (2006): 573–74, 577–80.
11. Sahlins, *Forest Rites*, x; Matteson, *Forests in Revolutionary France*, 161.
12. Giulia Pacini, “The Monarchy Shapes Up: Arboreal Metaphors in Royal Propaganda and Court Panegyrics During the Reign of Louis XV,” *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 39, no. 3 (2016): 431, 442.
13. Giulia Pacini, “Arboreal Attachments: Interacting with Trees in Early Nineteenth-Century France,” *Configurations* 24, no. 2 (2016): 176; Erik Fechner, “L’Arbre de la liberté: Objet, symbole, signe linguistique,” *Mots* 15 (1987): 41.
14. Kari Palonen, “Political Times and the Rhetoric of Democratization,” in *The Ashgate Research Companion to the Politics of Democratization in Europe: Concepts and Histories*, ed. Kari Palonen, Tuija Pulkkinen, and José María Rosales (New York: Routledge, 2008), 151.
15. Joachim Radkau, *Wood: A History*, trans. Patrick Camiller (Malden: Polity Press, 2012), 176.
16. Evelyn L. Forget, “Jean-Baptiste Say and Spontaneous Order,” *History of Political Economy* 33, no. 2 (2001): 193. Forget makes a clear distinction between the two parts of this idea: the notion that the marketplace self-organizes on the one hand, and that the self-organizing market leads to the emergence and evolution of social institutions, on the other. For the purposes of this chapter it is not necessary to observe that distinction.
17. Catherine Larrère, *L’Invention de l’économie au XVIIIe siècle: Du droit naturel à la physiocratie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1992), 5–6.
18. Paul Warde, *The Invention of Sustainability: Nature and Destiny, c. 1500–1870* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 266.
19. Fredrik A. Jonsson, “Adam Smith in the Forest,” in *The Social Lives of Forests: Past, Present and Future of Woodland Resurgence*, ed. Susanna B. Hecht, Kathleen D. Morrison, and Christine Padoch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 52.
20. Jonsson, “Adam Smith in the Forest,” 45.
21. François Vatin, “Le produit de la nature et le temps des hommes: Don, service et rendement,” *Revue du Mauss* 42, no. 2 (2013): 228.
22. See for example Stephen M. Gardiner, *A Perfect Moral Storm: The Ethical Tragedy of Climate Change* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2011); Per E. Stoknes, *What We Think About When We Try Not to Think About Global Warming: Toward a New Psychology of Climate Action* (Vermont: Chelsea Green Publishing, 2015).
23. Kari M. Norgaard, “Making Sense of the Spectrum of Climate Denial,” *Critical Policy Studies* 13, no. 4 (2019): 437–41.
24. Susanne C. Moser and Lisa Dilling, “Communicating Climate Change: Closing the Science-Action Gap,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Climate Change and Society*, ed. John S. Dryzek, Richard B. Norgaard, and David Schlosberg (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2011); Jennifer Jacquet, *Is Shame Necessary?: New Uses for an Old Tool* (London: Penguin Books, 2016); Stoknes, *What We Think About*.

25. For a critical overview of the return of the question of reason and emotion in democratic theory, see chapter 3 in Cheryl Hall, *The Trouble with Passion: Political Theory Beyond the Reign of Reason* (New York: Routledge, 2005).
26. For many in this field, the history of emotions promised a possibility to build scholarly work in the humanities on firm scientific grounds, and that historical studies could be combined with a neurological understanding of the nature of emotions. As it has turned out, this project proved to be if not unmanageable then at least more difficult to navigate than expected. The question of how human emotions should be understood biologically and neurologically seems far from solved, and this complicates matters for historians who wish to start from the scientific state-of-the-art. For a thorough and clarifying analysis of this problem, see Ruth Leys, *The Ascent of Affect: Genealogy and Critique* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).
27. Ute Frevert, *Emotions in History: Lost and Found* (New York: Central European University Press, 2011); Jan Plamper, *The History of Emotions: An Introduction* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2012), especially the chapter “Perspectives in the History of Emotions,” 276–93.
28. Albert O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism Before Its Triumph* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 24–27.
29. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests*, 33–35.
30. Hirschman, 32, 42.
31. Hirschman, 93.
32. Hirschman, 66, 107–9.
33. Emma Rothschild, *Economic Sentiments: Adam Smith, Condorcet, and the Enlightenment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 27.
34. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests*, 69–70.
35. Matteson, *Forests in Revolutionary France*, 197.
36. Matteson, 193.
37. Marie Bénigne Ferréol Xavier Chifflet d’Orchamps, Chambre des députés, March 20, 1827, tome 50, 448. All subsequent references to parliamentary sources refer to the *Archives parlementaires, recueil complet des débats législatifs et politiques des Chambres françaises de 1800 à 1860. 2e série, 1800–1860*, ed. Jérôme Mavidal (Paris, 1882). Information about the biographies and political careers of French members of Parliament come from the National Assembly website, *Base de données des députés français depuis 1789*, retrieved October 6, 2021 from <http://www2.assemblee-nationale.fr/sycomore/recherche>.
38. Parliamentary committee’s report, March 12, 1827, tome 50, 230.
39. Jean Jacques Augustin Rey de Saint-Géry, Chambre des députés, March 21, 1827, tome 50, 455.
40. Horace François Bastien Sébastiani, Chambre des députés, March 20, 1827, 431.
41. See for example Gardiner, *A Perfect Moral Storm*, especially chapter 5 “The Tyranny of the Contemporary.”
42. Sébastiani, Chambre des députés, March 20, 1827, 429.
43. Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), ed. Frank M. Turner (London: Yale University Press, 2003), 44.

44. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests*, 65.
45. de Saint-Géry, Chambre des députés, March 21, 1827, 454.
46. Parliamentary committee's report, March 12, 1827, tome 50, 230. Emphasis added.
47. Anna L. Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 38.
48. Tsing, *The Mushroom*, 40.
49. Matteson, *Forests in Revolutionary France*, 197, 203.
50. Parliamentary committee's report, March 12, 1827, tome 50, 230.
51. Marie Antoine Charles Suzanne de Terrier-Santans, Chambre des députés, March 20, 1827, tome 50, 458.
52. Sébastiani, Chambre des députés, March 20, 1827, tome 50, 430.
53. Antoine Bonnet de Lescure, Chambre des députés, March 20, 1827, tome 50, 436.
54. Marie Césaire Du Teil, Chambre des députés, March 20, 1827, tome 50, 435.
55. Matteson, *Forests in Revolutionary France*, 147, 193.
56. Matteson, 133–35; Jean-Baptiste Sylvère Gaye de Martignac, Chambre des députés, March 28, 1827, 582.
57. Christophe Chabrol de Crouzol, Chambre des députés, March 31, 1827, 662.
58. Evert Schoorl, *Jean-Baptiste Say: Revolutionary, Entrepreneur, Economist* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 19.
59. Jean-Baptiste Say, *Traité d'économie politique, ou simple exposition de la manière dont se forment, se distribuent et se consomment les richesses*. Tome 1. 5th ed. (Paris: Rapilly, 1826), 39; Vatin. "Le produit de la nature et le temps des hommes," 227.
60. Say, *Traité d'économie politique*, Tome 1, 171.
61. Say, 171–72.
62. Say, 172.
63. Say discusses the three cases in an order different than presented here. He also mentions two other cases, taxation and interference with private property for reasons of public safety. Say, 170–73.
64. Say, 171–72.
65. After the world-changing events in the colonies during the French revolution, when the enslaved of Saint-Domingue revolted and liberated themselves in 1791 and made France abolish slavery in 1794, Napoleon reinstated it in 1802, which eventually led to his defeat in Saint-Domingue, and the subsequent proclamation of Haiti as an independent state in 1804. Slavery persisted in the remaining French colonies until 1848. Laurent Dubois and John D. Garrigus, *Slave Revolution in the Caribbean, 1789–1804: A Brief History with Documents* (New York: Bedford/St. Martins, 2006), 197–99.
66. Caroline Oudin-Bastide and Philippe Steiner, *Calcul et morale: Coûts de l'esclavage et valeur de l'émancipation (XVIIIe–XIXe siècle)* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2015), 104–8.
67. Say, *Traité d'économie politique*, Tome 1, 357–64.
68. Say, 363.
69. See Oudin-Bastide and Steiner, *Calcul et morale*.
70. This more general argument is also presented by Evelyn L. Forget in "Jean-Baptiste Say and Spontaneous Order," 200.
71. Say, *Traité d'économie politique*, Tome 1, 172.

72. Say, 162.
73. Say, 161.

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