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March 17, 2015: Sustainable Political Thinking

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Title: Sustainable Political Thinking

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3/17/2015—The current conservative insistence that social disintegration is unrelated to money—so that the current push by the left to do something about income inequality will not raise taxes on the rich—is curious. It proceeds from an assumption that income inequality is not inherently bad, so that it is necessary to invent another goal other than redistribution to justify it. But, if worker productivity gains do not translate into more money for workers, then the bosses are stealing money that properly belongs to workers. You can correct that in different ways—stronger unions for example—but you don't need a theory of culture to do something about it. But the conservative drumbeat, by Ross Douthat and George Will, for example, reminds me that there is more to political life than money. In the same way that ecological systems must be sustainable, political life must also be sustainable. Political life that is nothing but argument by one side against the other is not sustainable. There are different ways of thinking about the styles of political life. Right now, all America has is ideological confrontation. (It is not really ideological). That is getting us nowhere. This style suggests far more differences among Americans than is really present. We exaggerate our differences because our political goals are merely oppositional. What would a more sustainable political life look like? I'm not sure. And maybe it is not possible. I'm told that the Permaculture Movement has an aspect of decision-making style. And it was once thought that President Obama's career as a community organizer would aid him in building consensus in Washington. But that did not happen. Maybe here, in styles of thought, is where philosophy could be of service to politics. Not philosophy in the analytic style of logic—though a little of that could not hurt in politics—but Martin Heidegger's questioning after being. A more soulful politics. On the other hand, did Michael Lerner's politics of meaning go anywhere in the 1990's?