



## Choice, real choice

I was baffled by Parliament this week, except it was very akin to human nature.

I am sometimes in meetings where this happens. Typically, there is a job that no one wants to do. The meeting then resolves to ask a different committee to look after this particular job that no one wants to do, so everyone agrees to a motion on those lines and moves to the next item on the agenda... (but usually nothing gets done in the end.)

When Parliament voted to send the Prime Minister back to Brussels, I just couldn't understand the triumphalism about it. I suppose at least a motion had been passed by Parliament, which is a success in itself in these majority-free days. But what really does it mean?

Does it not just mean that Parliament agreed to pass the buck to someone else? We can't decide how to solve the back stop, so we've agreed to ask Theresa May to tell Europe that they must decide how to solve the back stop.

It simply avoided the main issue. It feels like someone saying,

"I both demand the right to eat as much chocolate as I like, and I demand that I should not put on any weight. Indeed, everyone is agreed that I should not put on any weight; all parties have signed up to the fact that I should not put on any weight. At the same time, all parties are also agreed that chocolate is a

good thing and we all demand the right to eat chocolate..." And so on, round and round in circles.

I wonder if this desire, this belief that we can have it all without sacrifice, is partly a result of capitalist society. There's no fun in advertising a sacrifice: rather, we advertise on the premise of 'both... and...' And sometimes this is possible: I can both be clean shaven and have a successful marriage and sporting ability (Gillette); I can both enjoy family life and buy Christmas presents (John Lewis)... but it doesn't always work, even though we want it to. Sometimes, sacrifice is required, and we don't like this.

We can see these flaws in people's attitude to the environment: "We are all agreed that global warming must stop. We are all agreed that it is our fundamental right to go on planes as much as we like and to eat as much meat as we like."

We can see it sometimes in people's attitudes to jobs and childcare:

"My children are my number one priority. I demand the right to have an intensive job which needs commitment, time and energy."

Which is it? Global warming or cheap flights? Job or family? Forcing two fundamentally different directions together is a trick you can pull off for a while, but ultimately it is a delusion, and the impossibility gets exposed in the end. But human nature means we'll try to stick our heads in the sand while we can.

Jan 2019. *Thought for the Train* is a short column by the Rev Robert Stanier, the vicar of St Andrew and St Mark, Surbiton, for people to read on the train. You can also read "Thought for the Train" at [www.surbitonchurch.org.uk](http://www.surbitonchurch.org.uk).



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