

A bee in my green bonnet

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I hate waste. My wife will attest to the lengths at which I go in order to make the most of any resource we utilise before discarding it: I roll up the toothpaste tube to eke out any remaining paste that would otherwise be discarded; whenever I make porridge for breakfast for the family I like to wipe the pot clean with my finger; I prefer to put on many layers of clothes to keep warm in the cold months rather than turn on the electric heater in my office. I'm partly motivated by the desire to be frugal and save pennies whenever they might otherwise be lost. But I'm also motivated by the conviction that material objects don't like to be wasted and want to be utilised to their maximum potential. And, just as nothing in the natural world gets wasted within the various resource cycles, I want to make sure that even my waste can be turned into something useful. Hence I'm quite zealous about recycling.



I was into recycling before it was fashionable. Before the helpful phrase 'Reduce, Reuse, Recycle' had been coined, I had been one of the founding members of a recycling society at my school during 6th form college. Led by the vision of one of my colleagues, we introduced a scheme whereby green bins branded with the society's logo would be dedicated not for general waste but for items that could be recycled. These would be littered around the school's premises and their contents would be removed by a rota of 6th form volunteers. I had inherited this passion for managing waste from my parents: I remember fondly the joys of smashing old glass in huge metal collection bins usually found in supermarket car parks. Recycling was a joyful hobby rather than an arduous chore. Über-geek, I know.

It was with delight, then, that I observed the transition taking place in borough councils across London as gradually systems for recycling were implemented. Living in the boroughs of Lewisham, Brent and Bromley, it was interesting to compare the different approaches to waste management. The system where I live now, for example, operates on a rotating weekly rota whereby I need to remember which waste to put out on collection day. Each home is expected to do a reasonable degree of separating the waste into different categories, whereas in my previous home the borough permitted all recyclable waste to be simply put into one green wheelie bin. The fact that so much can be recycled comforts my heart, which often breaks at the thought of all the rubbish in landfill or other waste sites across the country.

But there's one major material that I find councils are unable to deal with: plastic film. While councils are happy to take firm plastics, such as pots, bottles or trays, the film, bags or wrapping that is usually used in packaging cannot be included in my current system for recycling. The inference is that films should be discarded with the general waste. Considering how long plastic can take to decompose, and the fact that so much packaging makes use of thin plastic films, I seriously worry about the effect all this film is having on the environment. Am I destined to throw away plastic film in the general waste bin and numb my conscience, which is otherwise begging to responsibly manage the natural resources of the universe around me?



Thankfully, if you're as passionate as I am about recycling, there's a way to recycle plastic film that I adopted about a year ago and would like to highlight for those who aren't aware: Many supermarkets have large soft bins dedicated for the collection of used plastic carrier bags. The good news is that any flimsy plastics, such as film packaging, can be recycled together with the plastic bags. A carrier bag hangs on the handle of one of the cupboards in my kitchen and whenever I want to discard plastic film, I simply collect it in the plastic bag. Once the bag is full, I tie a knot with the handles and replace the bag, while storing full bags next to my bin. Once in a while, when I visit the supermarket, I take the bags with me and happily send my used plastic film to be recycled into something new.

The blessing to have dominion over creation should be the same as our dominion under God, which is a dominion not of strength or reason but of love. By diligently separating my waste I demonstrate love and gratitude for the things I use and earn the qualification to govern them. In the spirit of being a true owner (one part of the three great subject principle) I exercise ownership over the natural resources available to me in part by managing waste well. And in so doing, I grow in my resemblance of God. A motto in the Unificationist community for the next 5 years is all about resembling the true love of our God, our creator. If we're serious about fulfilling this motto, I'm sure that we'll all become recycling champions.

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