



Scaling up would have to go along with some scaling down. Large political organisations, covering diverse populations and extensive territories, need to leave plenty of room for local politics. New technology could help to make a revival of local politics possible. To take one, seemingly banal example: the advent of 3-D printing could soon empower individuals and local communities to take charge for themselves of the physical production of the goods they need. It will become less and less necessary for vast quantities of these goods to be moved around the world. But this new localism will not work on its own. It will take political protection and political organisation to maintain it in the face of the forces of global capitalism, which will continue to sweep around the world, hoovering up money and resources. International politics needs to be big if it is to preserve the small. 3-D printers can't do the political work, any more than mobile phones can.

The problem with big-scale solutions is that they are too political.

Someone would have to force the issue. Nation-states are not incentivised to pool their resources in this way. The softly, softly technocratic approach is easier because so much can be done by stealth. Getting people – politicians as well as ordinary citizens – to sign up for a new kind of politics almost always takes a shock to the system. The traditional form this shock takes is war. The original EEC (the forerunner of the EU) was made possible only by the catastrophe of the Second World War and the looming disaster of the Cold War, which finally succeeded in banging French and German heads together. It is hard to see how a step-change to the next level of European federation – banging German and Greek heads together – will be possible in the absence of something similar. The US federal government is a product of two wars: the War of Independence from Britain, which produced a national government, and the Civil War, which finally gave that government the power to extend its coercive authority across the whole continent. Civil war looks very remote in Europe today because we are no longer interested in that sort of step-change. Reviving the prospect of war in order to achieve it seems a very high price to pay.

Peace promotes easy options. Easy options encourage bad politics. Bad politics threatens disaster. Disaster invites political salvation. It is a precarious business. Given time, and luck, we may get there without anything too terrible happening. The questions are: will we have the luck? And do we have the time?