Collaborations: *Joint Writings on Ecology, Economy, and Society*

By Rupert Read, *et al*.

Edited, with introduction, by Frank M Scavelli

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Introduction

Editorial Note: all references to pieces or articles are given in section numbers, as seen in the table of contents.

The failure of COP26 just a few months ago provides an unambiguous framing for the current world-historical moment – truly a crossroads for all humanity. This book – a collection of co-authored pieces by Rupert Read – with Nassim Taleb, Helena Norberg-Hodge, Jason Hickel, David Graeber, Jem Bendell, Richard Murphy, Jonathon Porritt, and many others – asks, in my view, the right questions – and even, rare as it may be, offers a few of the right answers – regarding the manifold crises within which we humans now find ourselves, to quote a piece I myself co-authored with Read a few years ago, 'deeply entangled' [29].

I agreed to edit this collection because I feel Read's work holds vast importance in overcoming this deadly dual impasse – a fraying socio-political system, and a disintegrating eco-climatic system. While I volunteered for the Sanders campaign in 2016 and 2020, largely due to my support for his version of the Green New Deal [29], I – and clearly many others – have felt increasingly alienated by the obsession with identity from the so-called 'Left 'in both the US and UK. Questions of political economy, ecology, and an alternate vision of *the good life* [1] – addressing not only the continued destruction of the natural world and the socio-economic misery faced by the teeming masses, but also, crucially, the clear *spiritual hole* achingly apparent in the lives of modern human beings – are completely absent from the critique offered by most so-called Left activists and academics [for example, see: 23]. Meanwhile, and surely spurred by this galling abdication on the part of our would-be Left, the fragile, ossified, and frankly unfit-for-purpose system of 'representative democracy' [13] is under siege by a virulent, resurgent radical 'Right,' which preys upon the anomie witnessed across Western society in a way not dissimilar to such forces in the early 20th century – the potential, ominous results of which one can all-too-easily hazard a frightening guess.

By contrast, Read is today a leading exponent of what has at times been called a 'Third Way.' This is nowhere better explained than in his essay How Ecologism is the True Heir of Both Socialism and Conservatism, with the title itself providing a decent summary. Ecologism is a political ideology which sees human beings, foremost, as a part and parcel to the natural world – in other words, as *genuinely ecological beings*. Ecologism is inseparable, politically, from: 1) radical, local democracy [2,3] ; 2) socio-economic re-localization and degrowth, with an aim toward an egalitarian, largely agrarian self-sufficiency, characteristically culturally-immersed *in the land* – i.e. in the fabric of local ecology [19]; and 3) a certain spiritual orientation toward life itself, on the Earth, which has always bound such communities together. This is not rank Ludditism: this political program is, in principle, compatible with many aspects of 'modern,' *i.e.* technological, life – but ecologism *does* carry with it the question, taken quite seriously given the state of our society and the natural world, whether every aspect of modern life is indeed *worth keeping* (neatly encapsulated in Read's idea of 'The Beautiful Coincidence').

Part One, 'The Pursuit of Growth,' is perhaps the single most important part of this collection, and has also never before been published. This substantial, lengthy philosophical dialogue, in terms of an intellectual foundation, sets the groundwork for much of what follows, rigorously pursuing questions

such as the proper direction and aim of human society, the requirements for its flourishing, and our relationship with Nature.

Part Two, and much of the rest of the collection, consists of many previously published articles and other writings, some of them several years old. There are, for instance, several articles written before the Brexit vote, or articles concerning various other social and political debates which have receded from immediacy – even the COVID 19 pieces (Part Five) will soon enough fall into this category. But, these articles and writings all express vital aspects of an ecologistic, or Green, perspective on fundamental issues and thus have, in a real sense, lost none of their potency. The many articles on Brexit, for instance, which call for political and economic localization and for trade aimed at fostering socio-economic sovereignty, are striking in their denunciation of the current economic and political regime, and are as matters of policy even more vital now than some five or six years ago. Part Three consists of writings which provide an exemplary overview of Green, or ecologistic, political thought. Part Four explicitly links these concerns with the gravest threat which hovers, and has ever hovered, over humanity: the climate and ecological crises. Part Five demonstrates the application of the ecologistic worldview to such a contemporary problem as COVID-19. Part Six contains pieces written just in the last few weeks of 2021, discussing the failure of COP26, its meaning, and 'where we go from here.' A short introduction is provided at the heading of each individual article, providing brief summary and contextualization. Meanwhile, another collection of Read's writings, containing single-authored pieces, is now under preparation.

Read is the rare example of a thinker in today's world – a world marred by political tribalism; a socially-imposed demand for 'correct opinions;' and myopic, frankly insane under-appraisals of world-historic trends, such as looming ecological collapse, ensconced in the heights of academia and the press – who is willing to look reality in the face, and to offer thoughts and solutions which are honest, compelling, and perhaps most importantly, motivated by a deep sense of compassion and kindness for his fellow human beings, and indeed for all life on this fragile planet, Earth, which we *call* – though, to our infinite shame, have not *treated as* – our *home*. His erudition in all these regards is mirrored in his collaborators. It is worth noting in this, the above described climate of social and political thought, that Read may not *agree* with everything his co-authors have ever said, or even the opinions they currently hold, on a host of issues – and what's more, they of his opinions, writings, and thoughts. Nonetheless, Read and his co-authors came together, writing these pieces around singular points of agreement, in a spirit of openness and cooperation, and in an effort to address the problems pointed to throughout this EBook. To close, let us note that this spirit of *collaboration* – the title of this EBook – which necessarily *must* come following a recognition of our shared humanity, and therefore our shared predicament – is perhaps what is most needful and now, more so than in any other time, in the history of our species here on Earth.

For Wild Nature,

Frank M Scavelli,
Piney Hollow, NJ
February, 2022

Preface: On Our Larger Selves

This free ebook collects together for the first time most of my previously-published and unpublished shorter work that has been done collaboratively, as so much of my work has been. (If there is going to be a future, it will involve us standardly operating as larger-than-individual units! Finding ourselves in a shared self larger than our small selves…) The pieces here that have been previously published (which is most of the book) are in some cases given here in larger / original forms, as they were before well-intentioned website-, magazine- and newspaper- editors messed with them…

The ebook is intended for the general reader; if you want to read my academic work, read my books or my published journal papers, which are easy to find.

My hope is that *this* book might stimulate the intelligent lay-reader to think - and to act.

If you find it so-stimulating, then please *share* it. It will live or die by what *you* and others like you choose to do. Rather like our living planet…the ultimate larger-(than-)self…

If you want to help me to do more like this, then please pay a quick visit to https://rupertread.net/why-i-accept-donations . I accept financial support to help me continue this kind of work: the money goes exclusively to my part-time Research Assistants. Thank you, in advance, if you choose to help in this way!

And thank you, for *all* that you do. And all that you will do… If this book helps you at all to be as big as you can be, then I'll be so very happy…

Thanks to those who gave their permission for things to be republished here.

Big thanks finally of course to Frank Scavelli, who right now is one of my top collaborators! His work on this project has been absolutely critical. Watch this space, for more by Read-and-Scavelli in future…

And: enjoy reading! Enjoy finding your way around. Do NOT feel obligated to read this book sequentially! It is designed to be read more on a 'topic' basis; my expectation is that most readers will find some parts of it such more relevant or exciting than others. Focus on those parts! This book really is a gift to you, from us, after all…

Rupert Read

Part One: A Philosophical Dialogue with Former MEP Catherine Rowett

1. The Pursuit of 'Growth': Is It Compatible With Success? A Discussion, With Proposed Answers, in Dialogue Form [2022, previously unpublished]

Former MEP Catherine Rowett and Rupert Read, in this magisterial dialogue, discuss the real implications, from the ecological to the social, of our civilization's commitment to endless, exponential economic growth. Drawing predominantly on Plato and Aristotle, in conjunction with recent, acclaimed works by Thomas Piketty and others, Rowett and Read thoughtfully dissect the consequences of economic growth, and propose alternative conceptions for the very foundation and aim of society. Rowett and Read convincingly argue that economic growth, in and of itself, is antithetical to *the good life* – yet they find points of disagreement in relation to the environmental limits to growth.

Abstract

Taking subtly different lines on issues of principle, Read and Rowett debate how the pursuit of economic growth relates to genuine measures of success and well-being for society. Rowett looks to the ancient world for a society in which economic growth never figured in any philosophical or economic theories. Instead, ancient ethics focused on other values that promote human welfare. Rowett argues that, in principle, growth might be feasible in some humane pursuits (e.g. literature and the arts) without damage to the environment, and that such growth would constitute an improvement in society. But Read denies that economic growth of any kind is ever compatible with good husbandry of the planet's resources. The interlocutors find themselves in agreement, however, on the fundamental claim driving the whole conversation: namely that economic growth is never in itself a good thing. They also conclude that as things stand, the kind of non-material growth that Rowett envisages (using solely the non-finite, renewable and organic resources at a scale that does not denude the planet) seems unattainable in practice.

The overall message is that economic growth is not a marker of success, brings no gain for a society that already enjoys a basic level of prosperity and tends to undermine many crucial components of the good life, such as equality, educational opportunities, justice, fairness, agency and autonomy. In fact, reducing productivity and wastage, if accompanied by improved distribution of wealth and resource, could facilitate genuine improvements to life and livelihoods—including various kinds of achievement and satisfaction that have been lost to us since economic growth became the exclusive goal.

Introduction

Read: Oh well-met, friend! You too are out for a walk on campus, this fine day?

Rowett: Yes, it's hot in the office and I'm sick of "working from home". These chestnut trees provide such a green shade. I've brought this new book I'm reading. It's about Plato's *Republic.* I was planning to find a log to sit on. Would you care to sit down too? Tell me what you're up to at the moment? I've not seen you for weeks.

Read: Indeed! Well I'm currently pondering how best to set out my thoughts on why the pursuit of growth is such a damaging idea in economics. You've got thoughts on that too, no? Would you mind if I try out my thoughts with you now?

Rowett: No problem! Actually that would be helpful for me too, and it's not irrelevant to my work on the *Republic*. Let's head for that bench? Or we could just walk? Walking while talking makes the discussion better, in my experience.

Read: Yes, I agree. OK. Well to start with, here's a question. Am I right, Catherine, that you and I agree up to this point—we're both wanting to challenge the idea that 'economic growth' is something to celebrate? It seems to be a dominant assumption that's driving policy across the globe. Everyone seems to assume that growth is a mark of success.

Read: Am I right, Catherine, that you and I agree up to a point on this—we're both wanting to challenge the idea that 'economic growth' is something to celebrate? It seems to be a dominant assumption that's driving policy across the globe. Everyone seems to assume that growth is a mark of success.

Rowett: Indeed, Rupert. That's such a mistake. In my view, any society that pursues economic growth as its main goal is actually pursuing the systematic destruction of its own wellbeing. But here's a counterfactual question for you. Might economic growth be desirable, and worth pursuing, if it could be obtained without irreparable cost to the environment? I mean, does 'growth in GDP' do anything good? Could it lead to improved well-being? Or to some other kind of worthy goal? Can it, or does it, sometimes deliver something of true value?

Read: I'd say that is most certainly a counterfactual. You say "Suppose we could have growth without harm, would it deliver anything good?", and my immediate response is, "Well we can't have growth without harm!". But I see that there's still the 'in principle' question. If we could have it with

no evil consequences at all, would it be worth having? Because the answer to that might still be "no"..

Rowett: That's the answer to which I'm inclined, at present— though I'm wondering whether it depends on what kind of things we're having *more of* as a result of the increased productivity. What is the increased productivity producing? Could there be things we'd be glad to have more of? I mean, surely there's nothing wonderful about increasing productivity regardless of the worth of what we're making. A product is a product, but some products may be frankly, quite horrid and destructive. I've never been keen on the production of weapons, or, worse still, the need to develop a market for weapons to ensure that we have an endless growth in demand for them!

Read: I get your point, especially about the need to create a continuing "market for weapons", though I can imagine colleagues such as Peter Kramer— experts on Nazi Germany and British Politics — who'd caution you against thinking that production of weapons in the UK in the late 1930s was a bad thing!

1. Would we be better off if there were no growth in GDP?

Read: I suppose one way to address the counterfactual question would be to look back at history. You're the real expert here. Aren't there long periods in the past when there was no growth at all? And maybe there are other times when huge growth in per capita productivity must have occurred, but in a situation where the human population was so small that the increased economic activity caused miniscule global damage. So let's think about whether, in the growth periods, there were improvements in things that really matter, and if so, whether they were a direct result of the growth in economic productivity— couldn't have occurred without it; and also whether in the zero growth periods there was no improvement in anything that we'd consider a mark of success.

Rowett: Well my expertise is really about Classical antiquity. As I understand it, historians of economics have calculated that from time immemorial, for thousands of years of human civilisation, there was effectively no economic growth.[1] To all intents and purposes, the graphs of GDP over time were effectively flat from prehistoric times, throughout all the great civilisations of the past, both in Europe and elsewhere, and right through the Middle Ages. Year on year growth in GDP, or in per capita productivity, appears to be a peculiar feature of the last three hundred years (aside from

1 See the presentation and graphs presented by Haldane 2015. I'm building here on a response I wrote to Haldane's paper. See also Graziosi 2015.

short fluctuations).[2]

Read: That's interesting, isn't it? The thinkers of the past didn't inhabit this weird assumption that we have, that one should measure the success of a society in terms of growth.

Rowett: No indeed. When ancient thinkers of Greece and Rome considered how to shape the best society, and reflected on the workings of a traditional economy with money, investment, loans, interest, insurance, wage-labour and various other financial institutions, their analysis didn't include any concept of growth, nor any ambition to build any such thing into their proposals for improving society, or for building the ideal city-state or republic— even though their aim was *explicitly* to enable people to live the best possible life.

Read: And you're saying they weren't wrong?

Rowett: Quite. They weren't wrong. Indeed, they were right. I think they were wiser than we are, and that we've gone badly wrong in forgetting how to think about politics and economics as a means to human well-being, the good life, and the long term good of the land we depend on.

Read: Yes, we tend to assume that if we have stuff to consume now we're better off than if we don't have that stuff and aren't consuming it. But I guess we ought to ask what stuff is really worth having and for what kind of enjoyment.

Rowett: Well, quite. Let's start by answering your question about the zero growth periods. During those zero growth periods, was there zero improvement in the quality of life?

Read: But I'm not sure we need to find *improvement*. You only need improvement if there's something that's not as good as it could be or needs to be. So the more fundamental question is whether a good quality of life was available and widely shared in such societies.

Rowett: Ha, yes, that's true. Not everything was perfect in the ancient societies; there was clearly room for improvement. But the next question is what does it take to get improvement in things that really matter? Does that require economic improvements? Or improvements in distribution of wealth? Or neither?

Let's think for a moment about what the ancient thinkers had to say when they were recommending ways to create a perfect society. Some thinkers (such as Aristotle) envisage a society that employs slaves; so in that case, even in their ideal community only the privileged

2 See Clark, G. 2009. Daly 1996 argues that economic growth ought to be regarded as abnormal, a merely transitional phase between two 'steady states' that are the norm.

classes would get to live freely and well—though not because of a lack of resources or economic shortages, but because only some citizens enjoy free and abundant access to autonomous life-choices and leisure opportunities (though that doesn't necessarily mean that the slaves were deprived of their basic material needs and creature comforts).Some thinkers (such as Aristotle) envisage a society that employs slaves; so in that case, even in their ideal community only the privileged classes would get to live freely and well—though not because of a lack of resources or economic shortages, but because only some citizens enjoy free and abundant access to autonomous life-choices and leisure opportunities (though that doesn't necessarily mean that the slaves were deprived of their basic material needs and creature comforts).

Read: Are you saying Aristotle thought the slaves had a good quality of life?!

Rowett: No, the opposite. My point is that the things they lacked are not material goods. But that's not what counts for quality of life. The reason why no one in the ancient world (or now) would choose the life of those Aristotelian slaves isn't because they lacked material goods or a job (they didn't)—but because they were deprived of autonomy, education, leisure time, political rights and all the non-material aspects of the life of a free person.

Read: Absolutely, but—

Rowett: On the other hand, Plato imagines a society without slavery, and with equal roles for men and women, in which all can realise their best ambitions and enjoy sufficient resources for engaging in the things that are rewarding in life. It strikes me as significant that neither those who think of a slave-owning society, nor those who would have freedom for all citizens, ever include in their plans any ambition to increase per capita productivity or raise 'living standards' for any sector of society. Nor to increase disposable incomes, or target anything that would count as economic success by the modern rule book.

Read: Are you sure?

Rowett: Well, I suppose there is just one place where Plato seems to try to "raise living standards". It's when Socrates responds to Glaucon's disgust at the poor quality of life in the so-called "City of Pigs" in the *Republic*—and then Socrates responds with the "luxurious" or "bloated" city, with provisions to satisfy the desires of the people who want more fancy goods and unnecessary stuff. Tellingly, to achieve that Socrates reckons they will need to grab extra land from the neighbouring tribes, and that will require the machinery of war. I think Socrates considers that to be a loss of the good life, and a problematic destruction of what had been a

sustainable and happy community.

Read: Yes, that's a bit where Plato himself seems to respond to the concerns we have now about unsustainable lifestyles.

Rowett: Yes, I've read some recent work drawing attention to that "ecological" theme in Plato.[3] In his attempt to amend that troubled and over-demanding constitution, Socrates decides to remove incomes altogether from the most privileged rank of citizens: not only ensuring that they have no disposable income at all to spend as they please, but also relieving them of any need to spend or earn money at all—a condition rather closer to the slaves in fact. Money, Plato suggests, doesn't bring true wealth; more money is not more desirable. In fact money and disposable wealth is irrelevant to success, and tends to distract a society from attending to what really matters. As Socrates notes,[4] the true gold is the gold that the wise person has in her soul. Someone with gold in their soul would have no desire for any other kind of gold.

Read: The *Republic* turns out to be pretty iconoclastic if we read it as an economic text book! So you'd say that when the ancient thinkers 'fail' to build any plan for economic growth into their models of a better society, that's not because they failed to think about economic issues at all?

Rowett: No, on the contrary! It's because they *had* thought about and investigated the effects of economic distribution and productivity! That's why they made no provision for growth. That's why they never suggest that increasing material wealth would improve conditions for the people in their society. They had no interest in growing the economy, because they saw no reason to want such a thing.

Read: Perhaps rather the reverse, actually? What you seem to be saying is that, for the ancients, the goals of human life, to which one should attend in developing a better society, were things like autonomy, active decision-making, political and domestic agency, intellectual enquiry, and a fair or just society.

Rowett: Yes, and particularly in Plato, this attempt to open up opportunities for free citizenship to the whole population, including the women and children with no hereditary class or gender privilege, is truly ground breaking. Plato's economic and political theory was designed to grow the citizens' autonomy, agency and free thought, with attention only to their abilities and not to their social

[3] See DeWeese-Boyd and DeWeese-Boyd 2007; Stone 2017; Usher 2020.
[4] Plato *Republic* 416e.

position or wealth.[5] For sure Aristotle is rather more keen on reserving the privilege for the male citizen class only!

Read: Someone might say that any form of city life is, by necessity, based on exploiting resources from the surrounding areas and therefore, in principle, not really sustainable – didn't I read that in Endgame or Deep Green Resistance?

Rowett: Oh but when Plato talks of founding a city, that doesn't mean a city in our sense of the word. The "polis" (which we often translate "city-state") is just a small collaborative state: it's a political unit, more like a county or district. The settlement might be clustered, for sure, with some central administrative buildings, but so long as the community lives on its own farmed land, without importing from elsewhere, it won't be unsustainable..

Read: It seems to me that even the rather unimaginative Aristotle didn't think it was necessary to increase productivity, or to have *more* people enslaved to produce more stuff, or to import material goods from places where the populations were effectively enslaved for low wages, in the way that we do. And certainly, for the free people in his state, the aim is not to have to work!

Rowett: No, in fact the whole purpose was to free people from work, which is so different from the priorities we see now! Even in the traditional Greek societies, the main aim was *not* to have to work! To have a job was considered rather menial and degrading. Because work in production ties you up in tedious things that prevent you from getting on with the things a free person enjoys and benefits from doing. So you'd never find them saying we needed more jobs to keep people occupied!

Read: Indeed, they were surely correct about that. I mean, driving the workforce to focus more on production and less on autonomous action and free thought would clearly be counter-productive, if what makes a good human life is freedom, autonomy and time to think. And that's a thought that's in tune with some of the thinkers in *modern* times whom I admire the most: Tolstoy, Gandhi, Wittgenstein, and Illich.

Rowett: Yes. The more time spent on production or productivity (what Aristotle would call *poiesis*) is less time spent on action and active agency (what Aristotle called *praxis*); but it's the latter that's the goal of a free person—that is, of the kind of person who has the chance to act as a free agent; whereas a society obsessed with production of more and more material goods is a society with less time to devote to great achievements. And that means the society won't actually go down in

[5] See Rowett 2016.

history as a great society or a period when achievements blossomed, because great achievements are only possible if intelligent, able or committed people have the necessary education and leisure for engaging meaningfully in the life of the mind, and if people have time and space to devote to becoming autonomous, responsible, decision-making human beings.[6] And ideally that option should be open to all the people who have an interest and ability to engage in such *praxis*. That's what I think of as a decent society, and that seems to be what Plato had in mind; and it doesn't need to have much of a focus on productivity.

Read: So what you're saying is that, once everyone has enough to get by, the best thing of all is for everyone to stop working and be free! Free, that is, to do what humans do best, which could include science and enquiry.

Rowett: In a nutshell, yes. An obsession with accumulating excessive wealth, rather than wisdom, is an attitude that the ancient Greeks generally associated with foreigners and enemies.[7].And you also sometimes find accusations of greed (*pleonexia*) levelled against other Greeks, particularly in the Greek-against-Greek conflicts recorded by Thucydides in his history of the Peloponnesian War.

Read: It's also clear from recent analyses of contemporary societies in the Western world that increasing economic productivity and prosperity tends to be associated with increasing inequality in wealth, inequality in education, uneven life-chances, and unequal privileges in all other aspects of life, leading to a situation where the majority of people in a community can't fulfil their potential: they're excluded from the quality or quantity of education that's needed, and lack the leisure to develop their intellectual capacities. They don't have the chance to engage in adequately informed, reflective political judgement or agency. And that leads to increasing instability in the society, to social unrest, or to dependency and lack of initiative.[8]

Rowett: That sounds much like the condition of the slaves in the ancient world! And I think that's a fair comparison, because while we're quick to condemn the condition of slaves in traditional societies, we tend to turn a blind eye to how the gross and increasing inequality in our own societies produces a lot of the same injustices and misery.

Read. Right. This might sound hyperbolic. But if it does: It's worth remembering that the evidence

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6 This claim is supported by Hirsch 1976, who argues that the increase in number and complexity of material possessions concomitant with such growth makes it harder for people to focus, to be happy, to be moral, to be able without arbitrariness to choose, etc. .

7 See for example, Plato *Republic 435e-436a,* where Socrates lists some characteristics of non-Greek ethnic groups, listing a love of money as typical of the Phoenicians and Egyptians.

8 One of the most influential texts on the issue described in this paragraph is Wilkinson and Pickett 2009, to which we return below.

suggests that the condition of most blacks in the USA was not improved in the generation after the abolition of slavery. This horrific fact, explored in the classic works of C Vann Woodward, needs to be better known. Political rights were mostly not gained by slaves, many were saddled with semi-endless debt, lynchings actually increased, and – and this is the point Marxists rightly make – the responsibility for feeding themselves etc passed to the former slaves, ridding Southern bosses of it.

Rowett There were economic benefits to be gained from abolishing slavery. 'Wage-slavery' can be more efficient for capitalists.

Read: Indeed so. None of this, obviously, even begins to make slavery OK. But what it does is undermine our casual assumption that the ills of our society are obviously and self-evidently less bad, less severe than the ills of slave societies. People tend to think that even the 'lower orders' in modern societies are better off than ancient (or modern) slaves, and that modern 'democracy' is self-evidently an improvement on the kind of democracy that excludes in principle the vast majority of the population. But this is less obvious than it appears; it is mostly a way of patting our own society on the back. The obscene inequalities of our world—far greater than were possible in ancient times— have been shown (e.g. by Wilkinson and Pickett) to be mindbogglingly harmful; these inequalities too are power inequalities; and this is before we even mention the horrendousness of living in a society whose future is radically uncertain, except in the certainty that it is definitely driving its own children off a cliff. What this should tell us is not that there was anything OK about slavery; what it should tell us is that our civilisation is much more problematic than we complacently assume. My suspicion is that our veneration for our own society is a combination of (1) understandable but rather crude and complacent assumptions about the idea that we've attained 'democracy' (when what we really have is a plutocratic oligarchy with a veneer of semi-fake democracy); (2) the tendency of *any* society to regard itself as basically on the right side of history; and (3) self-praise for our immense *material* wealth. I guess people generally think that the living conditions now are genuinely better (e.g. because more sanitary) than those of the ancient world. Perhaps that is a result of increased material wealth?

Rowett: Well I'm sure people are pretty glad about the improvements in sanitation, housing, transport, heating and various other creature comforts. In those respects we wouldn't fancy a return to medieval or ancient conditions. But supposing we accept that. Once we've got warm-enough houses and clean running water, do we need *further* growth to make things *better*? Do we think that without *further* growth things won't continue as good as they are now? Suppose the economy were to 'flat-line' from now—or 'stagnate', as they like to say, which makes it sound like something *undesirable*? Suppose we could retain current standards of health, housing and

infrastructure—or, preferably, suppose we could return to the decent standards we had before the damage done by "austerity"—and suppose we could go on for thousands of years like that with no further rise in living standards, what would be so bad about that? I'm not suggesting we need a fall in living standards or a return to ignorance about health and hygiene. I'm just suggesting that very little is required for a comfortable and healthy life, and once we have that we don't actually need more.

Read: Actually, more might be harmful, surely? I can think of lots of ways…

Rowett: Yes quite. And besides it's not even clear that the improvements in living standards were facilitated by economic growth or depended upon growth. They may have *led* to growth…

Read: Yes, more on that in a moment. And we'll also need to ask whether the better living standards have brought anything else worth having? We can't just assume that monetary value tracks real value. I mean, money in itself is nothing to boast about.

Rowett: I'm a great fan of William Blake. I think he saw these things very clearly. Take his "Laocoon annotated"—I think I can find it on my phone here. Just let me get into the shade a bit to see the screen. Here it is. (Figure 1).

It's from 1820, and he's reflecting on (among other things) the devastating effect of the industrial revolution on the quality of life and on the life of the imagination. The image forms a good background to thinking about what we might have gained or lost in the move from those earlier epochs we were just talking about, when there was zero growth, to the period of constant economic growth that's continued from Blake's time to now. Our media and our economics profession today are obsessed with 'growth'. But surely Blake gives us some timely reminders of what we've lost because of it.

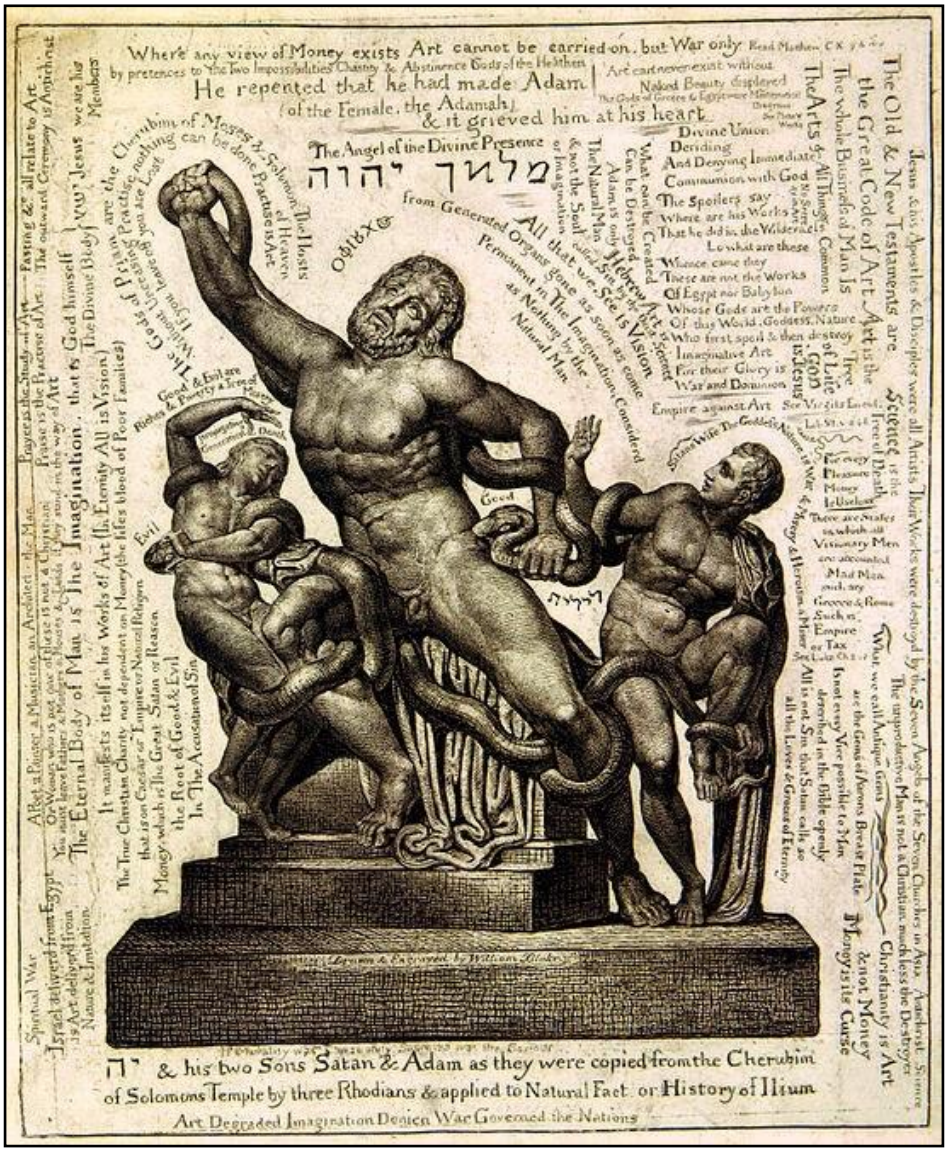
Let me just enlarge the picture a bit. It's too small to read here. Right, can you see? Among the slogans that Blake has inscribed here, we've got things like:

"Where any view of money exists art cannot be carried on, but war

Figure 1 William Blake, *Laocoon annotated*.

only; Art is the tree of life, science is the tree of death;

The eternal body of man is the imagination."



ה' & his two Sons Satan & Adam as they were copied from the Cherubim of Solomons Temple by three Rhodians & applied to Natural Fact or History of Ilium

Blake thought the imagination is ruined by the utilitarian obsession with making money and using science to that end. Actually, we could go further. Arguably imagination is something that thrives in situations of hardship, loss, grieving and brokenness, and is less powerfully stimulated in situations where nothing is difficult. That's a curious conundrum and something to be wary of.

Read: Interesting! Yes, I too am a big fan of Blake: a visionary very much for our times, methinks…But to return to that mythical link between growth and success, many studies have shown that, beyond a certain point, there's no systematic correlation between increased wealth and increasing well-being—not by any of the measures of well-being (that is, neither subjective feelings of contentment/happiness, nor objective gains such as improved safety, security or achievement).[9]

[9] A number of such studies are reviewed in Wilkinson and Pickett 2009.

In fact, people with much lower incomes and standards of living often turn out to enjoy a better *sense* of quality of life than those in developed countries.[10]

Rowett: Yes, and more significant still is the fact that, regardless of the absolute level of wealth, well-being and happiness don't correlate with absolute levels of wealth (provided, again, that the society is above subsistence levels), but they do correlate with equal *distribution* of wealth and *equality* in standards of living (as opposed to inequality). That is, even if the overall level of wealth is quite low, people will be happier and more secure if their situation is comparable to that of others in the society, and more miserable if they live alongside others who are much better or worse off.

Read: Good point: and given that economic growth is systematically correlated with increasing inequality—not just inequality in wealth but also health, opportunities, education, access to justice, participation in democratic processes, life expectancy and self-determination, because these all go together—it follows that growth is also associated with a decline in wellbeing across almost all measures for all the members of the society, but particularly those at the bottom of the scale of privilege.

Rowett: Yes, and we know this correlation is highly likely to be a causal link, and not just random association of two effects of something else.[11] It's *growth* that brings inequality. And inequality brings unrest, distrust and a range of serious social ills that themselves inhibit not only well-being but also productivity (and, thus, ironically, growth). In truth, there's a self-destructive motif in the pursuit of growth, even before we turn to the environmental issues.

Read: I think we should postpone talking about the environmental issues for the moment. Let's come back to that later, if you've enough time?[12] We could go somewhere to eat our lunch maybe?

Rowett: Yes, that would be good. Do you have lunch with you?

Read: Yes, (laughing) I brought a "brown bag", just in case.

Rowett: OK. Me too. Mine's not vegan I'm afraid, but I've got some tiny strawberries from the garden. So, talking about the ways in which growth is damaging to society…

Read: Yes, a fascinating example here is the 'Asian tigers': Korea, Taiwan, Malaysia, Hong Kong and

[10] See e.g. the striking evidence offered by Wilkinson and Pickett 2009: 9f.
[11] Wilkinson and Pickett 2009 argue for this point in the latter part of their book.
[12] See below, section 2.

Singapore. It's often said that these provide, collectively, one of the world's best case-studies for the benefits of economic growth. But let's not jump to conclusions! The case for crediting the improvements to their economic growth is not proven at all. There's a piece by Wilkinson and Pickett[13] —in which they draw on World Bank reporting, and use it to prove that it was only because they *first* created relatively equal societies that the Asian tigers were able to achieve that growth. So in fact, equality of distribution was a *necessary condition* for the growth they went on to experience; and it was arguably the equality of resources, not the growth itself, that was the true source of their 'success'. In fact then, we could say that the Asian tigers were on the right track as long as they concentrated on increasing equality, and then they started to spoil it by having enormous rates of economic growth which on the one hand are not sustainable and on the other hand will in any case inevitably eventually undermine everything that is good about their societies, including any sense of equality. For actually, when you look at them, what's really telling is that as these societies have grown in economic terms, they're also tending, surprise surprise, to become much more unequal again. And that's now leading to increasing social problems there (as well as ecological problems of course).

Rowett: Which we'll talk about over lunch!

Read: One reason for the social problems is that the proclaimed economic growth serves as 'cover' while these supposedly "successful" governments continually turn a blind eye to the growing inequality, always pretending that (despite appearances) the society is really benefiting, because of the economic growth. Because they're valuing growth for its own sake, and not measuring outcomes, targets for increased growth serve as an excuse for creating and perpetuating inequality, and for not sharing goods more fairly, more equally. Everyone's promised jam tomorrow: they're forced to acquiesce in radically inegalitarian distribution-patterns of bread-with-no-jam today. But no limit is set on how long the period of growth is to last. Indeed it can never end, because its target is unlimited increase, the more the better. So it's obvious that there can never be a tomorrow at which the inequities will be set right, because tomorrow we're still looking for more growth and deferring the redistribution for another day.

Rowett: Depressingly, that rings all too true. And besides, doesn't it seem that in order to maintain the myth, those polities can never afford to acknowledge that the inequality and social problems are a consequence of the untrammelled growth, and a negative one at that. It's a fair generalisation that the economics texts are written by those who see only the economic benefits to the few, and consider neither the environmental nor the social injustices as relevant to their overall economic calculation.

[13] See especially Wilkinson and Pickett 2009: 239.

Read: Yup. Those evils don't start to figure until they start to damage the prospects for further growth. But in fact an end to the cycle of growth will come – as society collapses under the burden of the ecological 'collateral-damage' of it.

But here's another even more telling case study than the one about the Asian tigers, which gives the other side of the picture: Kerala. This region of India has for many years achieved far better results on various measures, including the health and well-being of its citizens, than other parts of India, and it has done so while barely growing its economy at all.[14] This was partly because the Keralan regional government specifically targeted the improvement of its citizens' health and well-being, rather than economic growth; and it's partly because of the way in which Kerala was consistently becoming a more equal society than other states in India—indeed that was very largely because of that same regional policy. The Kerala example is pretty clear evidence that inequality is systematically inimical to true human flourishing, and that chasing growth is not just irrelevant, but may even be counter-productive for genuine well-being. And that doing the very opposite is a better way to achieve a truly better society. Which is roughly what you were saying earlier, isn't it?

Rowett: So I think what we are both saying here, and finding ourselves agreed upon, is that targeting economic growth is a dangerous distraction from the more important task, of creating a better society. As I said earlier, when we think about how to create a better society *directly* we don't think about economic growth as a goal at all. Actually, growth may be an obstacle to progress.

Read: And we've also seen that if we *must* pick a proxy, then *equality* is a far better proxy for success than growth. For all known societies, creating a more equal society will invariably lead to improvements in virtually every aspect of life. Creating a society with a higher GDP, nowadays, typically will not lead to improvements in any.[15]

Some further historical reflections

Rowett: Taking up your cue, I'd like to think some more about that correlation between equality and social goods, which you noticed in the Kerala case. I mean, instead of assuming that life gets better because of the growth, might it not be that the good things are a result of something else? Do you

[14] For detail and discussion see Parayil 2002.

[15] The arguments in Hirsch 1976 again offer powerful support for this claim. For example, growth and a rising 'standard of living' leads to increased competition over 'positional' goods (goods that are intrinsically scarce because they depend upon their 'position': sea-views, for instance). This competition will lead to a general degradation of quality (through competitive building of high-rise buildings near sea-fronts, for instance) which will undermine quality of life. Those worse off will never be able to 'catch up', and everyone (including the relatively better off) will suffer in the resulting competition.

get my drift?

Read: What you're saying, if I understand correctly, is that if there's been a notable increase in human achievements, and in our access to what's best and most valuable, since the industrial revolution, that might not be because of the growth in GDP and the material prosperity. It might be due to the good conditions that (coincidentally) facilitated that growth. And if that's so, then life would have been equally good with those things in place but without the economic growth. Right?

Rowett: Yes. It seems to me that one way to address that question is to ask another. Let's ask whether the greatest achievements in art, imagination, literature, architecture, philosophy or morality have chiefly occurred over the period in which there has been exponential growth in per capita productivity and rising 'living standards' in material terms—that is in the period since the Industrial Revolution? Granted there have certainly been some impressive achievements during the last two centuries, but compared with the incredible flowering of spectacular achievements in Europe in the Renaissance and in the Middle Ages, in the Greco-Roman world in the classical period, in Egypt and the Euphrates valley back into the mists of time, in India and in China way into the distant past, can we really say that the period of industrialised growth in productivity has seen any significant, unusual or even average growth in artistic or intellectual achievements, or in the general level of moral or spiritual excellence?

Read: Especially if we 'measure' these achievements per capita (for, populations used to be much smaller)!

Rowett: Yes. So: *Has* this period been something that we might call a period of true civilisation, a culture to be proud of?

Read: Wittgenstein thought ours a civilisation precisely in want of real culture.[16]

Rowett: Too right: the crucial word there is "real", probably. All the magnificent civilisations of the past seem to me to overshadow the achievements we've seen more recently during the time of the railways and the iron bridges and the telephones, computers, aircraft, nuclear weapons, space travel, CCTV and drones. That's not because these more recent things aren't impressive. It's more because they're achievements of a different kind. The technological gains are primarily directed to the project of overpowering and suppressing nature, dominating other people, and reining-in the spirit of spontaneous human creativity, so as to constrain and channel it towards goals of efficiency, utility and productivity. By contrast, the classical ages were exuberantly

[16] Wittgenstein 1998: 64e

directed towards finding ways to celebrate nature, to pour out the human artistic imagination in joy at its own creativity, and to discover and explain the magnificence of a world that is greater and more interesting than we are.

I don't see this redirection of creativity and enquiry towards domination and exploitation of both human and natural resources as an overall improvement in the human condition. It hasn't to my mind provided more things of genuine lasting value. It's not been a period of civilisation to match that of the ancient societies or of the Renaissance. Nor has it, I'd claim, been accompanied by any general or lasting improvement in the attitude of individuals or nations in the Western world, towards their neighbours and rivals. Scarily, we stand now on the very cusp of destroying ourselves completely, either by self-imposed ecocide, or possibly more swiftly still, by nuclear annihilation. What right do we have, in a globalised society standing on the very precipice, to claim that we're living in a civilised manner? What right do we have to claim that we have actually, truly 'progressed'?

Read: Some people would say that the older societies you're talking about achieved what they did by excluding some people from the leisure and the prosperity and relying on enslaved labour. So weren't they also unequal societies that exploited people and raided the goods of their colonial subjects?

Rowett: I think that objection is way off the point, because we are considering whether growth in productivity, and increasing consumerism, is an advantage. The key thing about those traditional societies is that everyone, rich and poor alike, was looking to have *enough for a good life*, and then, once you have earned enough to be comfortable, their aim was to achieve freedom —to have the leisure time and opportunity to pursue the good things. They were not trying to push up productivity. For sure, what I'm arguing is that when the societies were more equal, *more people* could flourish in this way.

Read: It's equality that makes that possible, not more and more exploitation of the workers to produce more and more surplus wealth!

Rowett: Correct. It really annoys me when people can't see the good things that are achieved as a result of leisure, because they are so obsessed with thinking that leisure is only attained by having someone else do all the work. No! It's perfectly possible to spread the necessary work, and the resulting income, equally across society and let everyone have an adequate share of the wealth and an adequate share of the leisure, so that everyone has the chance to use their leisure time to

do great things. That (for instance) is what a Universal Basic Income would assist with.[17] So the point about the ancient societies is not that they were models of egalitarian distribution (they weren't, though they were not as bad as modern capitalist societies are) but that the achievements that they achieved were achieved by allowing people to have leisure, not by increasing prosperity, wealth, consumption or material goods. No economic growth was required for what they achieved, and no economic growth would have been required for them to improve equality, had they wished to, and to provide access to leisure and education for all instead of just some. In almost all these respects they were actually better at it than our current, supposedly successful, societies, and we shouldn't get distracted by the idea that they depended upon slavery or denying rights to women. Economically, there is no difference between exploiting people by enslaving them and exploiting them by extracting their labour to make a profit for the wealthy shareholders, while paying the worker at barely a living wage.

Suppose there have been good things. Are they due to growth?

Read: Absolutely agreed. But some people might disagree with your claim that there's been little to celebrate in the way of achievements in the modern industrial world. So I suggest we suppose, for the sake of argument, that some things have got better since the industrial revolution, and that there have been real improvements as a result of the advances in technology and our wider access to technological aids. And indeed that seems a reasonable supposition, the kind of supposition that animates Steven Pinker.[18] Let's suppose further, for argument's sake, that, among the good things that we've done over recent decades, there have been some really splendid major things of which humankind might be unabashedly proud. Now I suggest we should ask whether any of those splendid things have been achieved *because of the growth in GDP* and in material prosperity; or are they to be attributed to some other factor?

Rowett. I'm reminded of a talk that you chaired, Rupert, here at UEA: by the Bank of England's Chief Economist, Andrew Haldane, in 2015. He set out amazingly clear and convincing evidence that the period of innovation and development in science and technology leading up to the industrial revolution came after, and was directly dependent upon, a raft of social and educational improvements that took place over a period of several centuries before the period of rapid

[17] See further in my talk on this topic for the Royal Institute of Philosophy, at https://youtu.be/sJgrP4UIpRQ .

[18] See e.g. Pinker 2011 and Pinker 2018, passim. Pinker's data on the alleged decline of war has been brilliantly critiqued by Nassim Taleb: see e.g. https://www.vox.com/2015/5/21/8635369/pinker-taleb; and with similar excoriation by Herman and Peterson, https://isreview.org/issue/86/steven-pinker-alleged-decline-violence .

growth.[19] Take the wave of innovation and scientific discovery that occurred during and after the Renaissance. It followed a period in which literacy improved, education improved, the arts were sponsored, learning from the ancient world was recovered, enquiry flourished in the monasteries and in schools and in the newly founded universities, and scientific enquiry was increasingly pursued and valued. These things *were themselves improvements*. Life was *getting better because of them.* But all that happened long before we begin to see any rapid growth in GDP. They weren't *consequences* of that growth. No! They were the preconditions for it, the sine qua non.[20] Or at least, it seems pretty clear that the industrial revolution would almost certainly not have happened without them.

Read: Actually, we could probably go further. It's probably true that those improvements in social and educational opportunities in the Medieval and Renaissance periods directly facilitated the innovations and growth in scientific understanding that was later harnessed for the purpose of devising ways to exploit natural resources and human resources more "efficiently", and that increased exploitation eventually led to growth. So first you have the better quality of life and then you put it to use in spoiling the world and the social conditions once more, in the name of increasing wealth, much as we just described with reference to the Asian economies.

Rowett: But you do that only if, you are labouring under the misapprehension that spoiling the world and accumulating more wealth is the better way to go on. That's the mistake, but there's no logical entailment. Technology doesn't develop itself. It responds to investment put in by people who've set that as their goal. We shouldn't offload responsibility for this mess onto science: science offers greater understanding but it doesn't choose the exploitation. That was chosen by industrialists.

Read: Yes exactly.

Rowett: I think it's also probable that none of that new exploitation of planetary resources, and pursuit of unsustainable productivity, would have happened without a certain change in attitudes towards material gain and utilitarian values. I think it's not accidental that it coincides with a period of radically changing religious and moral sensitivities. I'd say that the commitment to growth and exploitation arises in parallel with the emergence of attitudes that are characteristic of the protestant capitalist society, in which material gain is seen as a blessing or reward, a mark of

[19] Haldane 2015, graphs for literacy rates, violent crime and deaths in conflict, on pages 29-30.
[20] My point here is partly analogous to the one Rupert made above, drawing on Wilkinson and Pickett 2009 about the Asian tigers. The real achievement, in *that* case, was arguably the creation of more equal societies. That facilitated growth; but the growth was an insignificant consequence, not something to celebrate. In both these cases — and, I suspect, in many more besides — GDP-growth is more consequence than cause, and more accident than essence.

divine favour. I don't see that attitude in other pre-capitalist civilisations either ancient or modern. So we don't find the same sort of deployment of technology for economic gain in the ancient or Medieval worlds. For sure they developed some techniques for using water wheels for milling, and methods for producing woollen cloth in large quantities and so on, but these were devices to facilitate processes that were very laborious if done without machinery, so that goods would be cheaper and less labour intensive. That can be a start towards ensuring that everyone can have enough without working all the time.

Read: The problem really starts when you invent machines in order to put some workers out of work, replacing their work with machines, so as to render them destitute and then employ them (if you employ them at all) for further menial tasks at a low wage, with the aim of increasing the profit for the factory owners. That's a specific attitude to the machinery: not seeing it as a way to free us (and all our neighbours and dependents) from drudgery, but as a way to extract more productivity from the workers, for less reward.

Rowett: What spoils the flourishing society that had emerged during the late medieval and renaissance period is surely this kind of new desire for exploitation— the idea that producing more is always better and that enough is never enough.

Read: So, to sum up: what we're saying is that those pre-industrial improvements (in literacy, education, free thinking and enquiry, scientific understanding and the arts) were in themselves the things that made life better. They don't cause the damage, and without the Protestant outlook they wouldn't have led to this kind of worship of economics— though the opportunities they offered were exploited by those who took up that idea that productivity is a virtue in itself. .

Rowett: Yes. Those improvements made life better then, in the late Medieval and Renaissance period; they made life better in the great civilisations of the ancient world; they continue to make life better even now, if and when we still get a chance to enjoy and celebrate the works produced in those golden ages, and on the odd occasions when we still find opportunities to aspire to excellence. It is surely because of those achievements that human life has got better, if life has got better. When life gets better *it's because of those achievements!* Whereas more growth, by way of further exploitation of the world's resources, is, in fact, likely to put that possibility of a good life for all seriously at risk—but that's for when we get onto the ecology side of things, over lunch.[21]

Read: We could stop for lunch now if you like?

[21] See Section 2.

The damaging conception of human beings as 'capital'

Rowett: Not just yet. There's something else I wanted to say first. Another idea that bugs me is the notion of "exploiting human resources". Can we talk about that a bit?

Read: You mean the idea of "human capital"?

Rowett: Yes. What they mean by the state's 'human capital' is its *citizens*. They're treated as a kind of tool or equipment, and the idea is that it's wise for the state to invest some expenditure on making those tools into a usable 'resource', in the hope of getting better returns.

Read: So you're saying that the justification for attending to the needs and welfare of the working population is an economic one, because they're a 'resource' that will yield profit if the right investment is made.

Rowett: Why am I so alienated by this way of thinking? Let me try to imagine what the economist who thinks like this will say. (We should have invited one here to make the case! Let me see how well I can do it on their behalf...). Here's the pro-growth economist explaining why his society invests in its workforce:

> "Well it makes good economic sense to nurture one's citizen body, to keep the people healthy, well-educated and able-bodied. Revenues will be improved if we ensure that incentives and employment structures are such that none of the valuable resources goes to waste, watching TV or being economically idle. We don't want them stuck at home with no transport to somewhere where there is something good for them to do. 'Human capital' is as important to a society's income stream as other kinds of expensive and high value capital, and this provides a reason within our economic system for tempering some of the more extreme consequences of the pursuit of growth."

Read: That's an interesting concession your growth-economist has made there. He (you seem, not unreasonably, to have assumed it's a he!) is suggesting he might need to halt the damaging effects that arise from the unbridled pursuit of gain—that is, the pursuit of growth in gross terms, at the level of the national GDP. Because left to itself that will deliver (as we mentioned earlier) extreme inequality, if it's left untrammelled in a free market economy without sufficient controls or redistribution. We can see that now, in the increasing inequality and poverty that we're currently seeing in the UK and in many parts of the world over the past generation or two, and it's likely to become much worse now that the regulations that were kept in place by the EU are open to change in post-Brexit Britain. That kind of inequality and deregulation can lead to some people

being completely side-lined, either because cheaper skilled labour is available elsewhere, or because skilled labour can be imported already trained, from other countries. But what your economist was saying was that a deskilled and unmotivated work force is a wasted 'resource'. So if you care about making use of that resource to increase productivity, instead of leaving it idle or festering into unrest, you will invest some cost and effort into education, transport connections, and opportunities, to bring those idle resources into productivity.

Rowett: Yes, but even that moderate kind of capitalist thinking is still peddling the idea that people are a *resource* to be mined for profit. The economist isn't thinking about whether it makes the people happier to have such opportunities, nor whether it makes the society fairer. He doesn't see that those people *are the society* whose interests are being promoted. He doesn't grasp that economics is meant to *serve them* not *use them*. He's only interested in whether exploiting them delivers economic benefits (but benefits for whom exactly?). A completely abstract measure of per capita GDP is used as the measure of success, but with no attention to per capita wellbeing—or indeed to individual and community well-being, with no averages allowed!

To my mind, thinking of human beings as a 'resource' — the very idea of "human capital" — is alienating. It frames human beings as *things* to exploit and profit from. Idle or uneducated citizens are a "waste", a "drain on society", as also are unoccupied spaces and uncultivated fields.

Read: That's a good connection to make. Thinking of spaces that are left to nature as spaces wasted is plainly wrong. Maybe there is something fishy too about thinking of nature as a form of capital (as there is something fishy about thinking of humans as a form of capital).[22] Maybe having "capital" as our master-metaphor is itself a trick of capitalism…

Rowett. Indeed. It's a utilitarian, instrumental way of thinking, far removed from the idea that human beings are agents with the potential for self-fulfilment and with values of their own that aren't always measured in terms of wealth or property. It conflicts with other measures of the worth of a society that we apply in considering other cultures and periods in history, where —as historians and anthropologists—we generally measure a historical or prehistoric society or civilisation by its achievements in the things I listed earlier: justice and freedom, knowledge and wisdom, literature, art and music and other fine things that will be remembered with admiration and not disgust, and we look with distaste on exploitative colonialism and pillaging. For this purpose, human beings, including the poor and indigenous people, are not just stuff that should be educated enough to be

[22] A selection of relevant material on this topic has been assembled by the "Debating Nature's Value" Network at Anglia Ruskin University. See the website at https://aru.ac.uk/global-sustainability-institute-gsi/research/ecosystems-and-human-wellbeing/debating-natures-value/resources.

profitable, so as not to be a loss-making enterprise. They are—or should be— *beings* with the capacity to take a part in the creative cooperative endeavour that is a civilised society. If they've become just stuff in the minds of those who exploit them, then that's already a failure. And since no one is made happy by discovering that they are valued like a slave, to be exploited if they bring in a profit and discarded if not, this attitude is a direct source of unrest and de-motivation.

Assessing research for its impact

Rowett: And here's another thought that you'll be familiar with, Rupert. Take the introduction of impact criteria in the "Research Excellence Framework". Why do you reckon that's been so alienating to researchers—especially to those who value their inquiries for the intrinsic importance of the knowledge that they deliver? I think it's because assessing that research primarily or exclusively by its impact for productivity or the economy amounts to treating the researchers as a capital investment, their worth measured for its contribution to GDP and marketable exports.

Read: Interesting. But surely there are some fields where academic work may happen also to have value for certain kinds of economic enterprise, alongside its contribution to knowledge—and, indeed, some kinds of research in most fields can have that kind of value? And some of that value may in principle be partly measurable, in terms of a financial yield for the nation that supports it, or for the wider world. I mean, both you and I have had very successful impact cases to submit that were not the worse as research for the fact that they also had a pay off, for society, political policy and so on

Rowett: Oh indeed, no. I'm sure we're both happy to agree that academics' work should not be restricted to the ivory tower, in cases where it has relevance to life beyond the academy: after all, we'd not be working on this dialogue for publication now if we didn't both think like that.

Read: And it's fair that academics whose work makes a difference in the wider world should get some credit for that.

Rowett: Sure. But there's a double mistake, it seems to me, in the current impact-oriented approach to the public funding of research in the UK: for, first, it assumes that the most important goal of enquiry is economic gain, not a gain in knowledge; and, second, it mistakes economic gain for genuine success, and takes that as a measure of whether society is getting value for its money; but genuine success might in fact be measured neither in knowledge nor in economic productivity but in some other domain, such as, say, peace or social harmony.

Read: Yes, or some kind of virtue, such as humility, and recognition of the truth about our predicament,

for instance.

Rowett: Quite. But my point was not just about the mistake being made by the assessment tools. It's also about the alienation of the workers. Intelligent researchers engaged in the discovery process know full well that their work is being assessed according to an economic measure that completely misses the true worth of their discoveries—which is of a completely different kind which bears no relation to the measure being applied; and this produces a powerful sense of alienation on the part of the researchers: for not only are they being valued instrumentally, but they are also being asked to contribute to a project that is actually worth-less, a project that is misdirected towards an end that has no value in itself, no value for the country, no value for the researchers nor for anyone else. In fact it may be destructive of the wellbeing of all of those parties to the transaction. So that whole way of thinking about academic enquiry (whether scientific or humanistic), as a kind of "investment" to promote economic growth and productivity, needs to be called out as bogus.

The research community needs to re-situate itself, to identify itself as a contributor to society in virtue of its *adherence to authentic values* that are being increasingly forgotten, but which we can surely start to recover, so long as we take a proper historical view, as I've been trying to do here, and remember what kind of achievements make for a great and distinguished civilisation. We should judge academic research for its contribution to freedom and clarity of thought, to morality and virtue. These too are a kind of 'impact'!

Read: Sometimes the most exciting and important research will be the work that reveals how wrong and misguided *our* current values and *all the current measures of success* are. Such research might teach the society that funds it to change its course: to *curb* its quest for growth, to see that exploitation—whether of natural resources, human workers, or research expertise— is no way to make the society or its thinkers great, admirable, or a credit to their country or the world. Maybe this discussion between you and me might itself be worth a few brownie-points in this respect!

Rowett But another key thing to note is that above all it's the arts and humanities that are equipped to remind us of these truths, and to challenge mistaken values when a society has run way off course. The REF needs to allow or even encourage research that undermines its own assumed values. Like this work we're doing now.

Read: Yes, once you think about it, it's an absolute scandal that, under the heading of 'Impact' in the Research Excellence Framework, any contribution to "increased economic growth" is ipso facto taken to be a *good thing!*

Rowett: Maybe it's time to draw these historical reflections to a close, and find somewhere to have lunch. I think the conclusion we've reached, with a fair degree of agreement, is that sometimes it's the pre-existing structure itself that needs to be questioned and challenged. In the case we've been exploring, the very idea that economic growth is a good thing needs to be challenged and rethought. It's above all the arts and humanities that are equipped to think about why that might be, to understand what's happened that's taken us off course, and to remind us how to go back and think again. That's what we've been doing here.

2. Is there a problem about growth on a finite planet with finite resources?

Read: I've been hoping you'd agree to stop for lunch soon!

Rowett: Yes, I'm pretty hungry now. Brain work burns up the calories… There's this place by the stream where we can sit side by side and dangle our feet in the water. It's not very shady, though. The other bank, over the little bridge is a little more shady.

Read: I prefer the sun. Let's stop here.

Rowett: Fine by me. Let's turn our attention to the ecological problems we face.

Read: OK so, here's the issue I'd like to think about. It's an issue which comes back to the question you asked me right at the start of our dialogue before we started walking. We've suggested that economic growth not only has no value in itself, but also conflicts with other things that do have genuine value. Now… isn't there a chance that the pursuit of growth also conflicts with these other true values in practical ways as well?

Rowett: In practical ways? I guess you mean that endlessly pursuing growth would, in due course, exhaust nature's resources.

Read: There you are, talking like that economist again!

Rowett: Oops! Anyway, you mean that by ruining nature, we'd render the pursuit of life itself and any kind of well-being *impossible*, because there'll be nothing left to exploit even for those who think it's there to exploit?

Read: Yes, among other things. I mean, doesn't economic growth always depend upon mining some

finite resources, or mining renewable resources, typically at a rate that outruns their capacity for renewal? And if so, doesn't that mean that we're committed (if we place growth as the primary goal) to depleting the supply of goods on which we depend, to the point where neither growth nor life itself can continue? And bear in mind here: this shows very clearly how it is absurd to think of our time as one which is exhibiting 'progress': How can we possibly claim that things have 'progressed', when, as a result of reckless growthism and materialism, our children are increasingly terrified about whether they will have a future at all?!

Rowett: So you're suggesting that the pursuit of economic growth leads not just to accidental consequences that are negative, but to inevitable consequences that are integral to the very pursuit of growth in itself.

Read: Yes, my thought is that preferring growth over no-growth economic ideals turns out to be incoherently self-destructive. All kinds of agriculture and foraging obviously depend upon harvesting parts of nature's abundance, and using it to sustain human life, but the ideal needs to be to find a circular system where just as much is put back, to improve the land and sustain it, as is taken out. By contrast when we pursue year on year growth, it seems impossible to imagine that anyone is drawing exclusively on renewable resources, at a rate at which they can regenerate to match. That would be possible only if nature were increasing its ability to produce and regenerate at the same exponential rate! Which it isn't.

Rowett. I suppose the question here is whether there is a *necessary* connection between economic growth and depletion of resources? Could there (in principle) be growth in production without depletion? My first thought is that there could, in principle, be some kinds of growth that call only on resources that are not finite.

Read: Well I've already committed myself to the opposite view in an earlier publication.[23] There I suggested that any policy designed to promote unrestrained growth is doomed, because growth is incompatible with good husbandry of the planet's resources (including, crucially, 'pollution-sinks' such as the atmosphere), all of which are finite. Indeed, my view is that this problem afflicts not just unrestrained growth, but any growth at all in countries such as the UK. My view is that we need a no-growth economy if we're to live within the resources of our finite home.

Rowett: OK, so it looks like our task now is to consider whether you're right about that, or whether I'm right that there's no *necessary* connection between growth per se, and depletion of resources. I'm

[23] In Read 2014: 183-88 I argue that we cannot reduce our ecological footprint at the pace required while pursuing (even the greenest of) growth strategies.

not saying a non-depleting kind of growth is practically feasible. But it might be that the connection is technically just a contingent one, and there could be some limited kinds of economic activity that have no impact on finite resources.

Read: If I get you right, you mean that there could potentially be growth in some but not all kinds of productivity (those that don't outpace the renewal of the resource, or use no finite resources at all). And that kind of growth might be compatible, in principle, with good husbandry of the world's future resources, and continued survival for all its species.

Rowett: Yes, that's the view I'm going to try to defend. We'll see whether it survives to the end!

Read: We may end up with no substantive disagreement on whether or not growth is a tenable objective for society!

Rowett: No, indeed. And since we've already concluded that it's not a goal worth having, the possibility that we could coherently pursue it and not kill ourselves and the planet hardly seems much of a concession! But let's talk anyway…

Read: Yes, because finding that growth is not just undesirable but impossible in principle would be an important conclusion, as also would finding that it's possible in principle but not in practice. Well, let's start with some brute empirical facts. In the industrial world the past couple of hundred years have seen an increase in per-capita productivity that's clearly been almost entirely fuelled by the mechanical extraction of resources—mainly using fossil-fuel-based power and transport, and other technology-based improvements. That's how the same number of people have been able to produce more per capita with less effort.

Rowett: That's true. But the fact that we have, hitherto, achieved growth by denuding the planet and exploiting non-renewable resources at an unprecedented rate doesn't in itself show that there's a necessary connection between growth in production and that kind of denuding the planet of resources, for every kind of product.

Read; No, but there are some other economic and demographic factors that are relevant. We ought to look into those too. For instance, if we're considering per-capita growth, that will automatically slow if improvements in health and welfare lead to population growth and greater longevity, even if the overall production stays the same, or even rises (if the rise is at a slower rate than the rise in population). So production has to increase to match population growth, even to stay level for per capita measures. Meanwhile if an increasing proportion of the population is unproductive due

to long term ill health or old age, because of advancing techniques for keeping people alive without improving health, then the increase in productivity of working age people has to be all the greater to maintain the same level of per capita GDP. So an increasing population and an ageing population appears to require a near-exponential increase in productivity, especially in productivity per capita of the working age population. To achieve overall growth in productivity in real terms, under these circumstances, you'd need higher per capita productivity by those who are productive. So that would surely require more of the finite planetary resources such as fossil fuels to enable a smaller proportion of the people to increase their productivity to cover for those unable to work. This is an issue not about population growth as such, but about increased longevity combined with poor health and techniques for keeping unhealthy people alive and unproductive for years. Combined with a declining birth rate this leads to an ever increasing need to extract more labour and productivity from a declining productive population, and we've been doing that by using fossil fuels and destroying forests faster than they grow.

Rowett: Well, here's one devil's advocate response, which cheekily uses the idea that human beings are a "resource" (which I was protesting against before). If you grow the population of *working age* people, that would be a kind of renewable resource (a permanently growing supply of more workers, reproducing in the same way as plants and animals are renewables). So if there's a kind of work that those additional workers can do that doesn't draw on finite resources, they'd be able to produce more products without draining the earth's resources, just because there were more of them. should be accompanied by some growth in the number able to work. So that is one renewable resource that is not in itself finite.

Or equally, you could just put more of the existing people to work (deploying those "idle resources" that the economists were so cross about a little while ago in our conversation!). Now suppose we imagine that we let those economists have their way, and make all those potential workers productive, reskilling them, finding work for them, adding more workers and creating more employment for them. By increasing the number of people working you'd get growth in productivity (that's what the economists wanted). That would give us an increase in per capita productivity without increasing the pressure on the planet, because those people were eating and breathing anyway, even when they were not working.

So the only increase in pressure on resources would be if the work those people were now doing was demanding additional resources. What I'm getting at is this question. Is there some kind of work or production they could do that would produce something worth having but doesn't require any material input, so you can make more of it without needing more stuff? If so, it seems to me that would be a counter-example to your claim that increased production always involves increased consumption of finite resources

A potential case for growth without exploitation? The creative arts

Read: Yes, though your scenario is quite messed up and off the point. You're changing the constraints since we were supposing that population increase might be not in the young and productive members but in the increased life-expectancy of those in ill health and old age. In fact you've elided three different things. First there's the increase in work force due to population increase in the working age, which you said is not a finite resource since it can go on increasing. But that's probably false since every additional human mouth needs food, heat and the like, so it adds to the strain on resources. Your second thing is about reskilling and bringing into productivity those who aren't working: that's about a finite resource but increasing their productivity without increasing the numbers of actual people in existence. That was what our economist was proposing in the earlier discussion, and it's a finite resource, not an infinite one. And the third point which you snuck in at the end, and is the only one that's really relevant, was about creating non-material goods that don't require finite resources. That relates to the things we talked about earlier: the achievements of human excellence in the field of learning, science and the arts. So, to be charitable, I'll assume that what you're suggesting is that growth in those parts of the economy and society— in 'the cultural industries', one might say—wouldn't require deployment of finite resources. They are rather "creating" not "consuming"—or the consumer consumes only something that has first been created.

Rowett: Yes, that's exactly my idea. Cultural productions such as literature and performance art don't intrinsically require any non-renewable stuff. And there are some more material crafts and artistic productions that just require traditional products such as wool, paper, linen and wood—resources that aren't exhausted but regenerate in the natural cycle, and, in the process, contribute to maintaining the balance of nature.

Read: All those things have to be husbanded carefully to avoid depleting soils and forests, naturally. But you're aware of that obviously.

Rowett: There's an unlimited supply of energy in wind, sun and wave power, and harnessing more of that doesn't deplete the supply. So in all these areas it seems that the resources are available for continued—indeed unlimited—growth, by harnessing resources that are freely available and are indefinitely compatible with the requirements of sustaining the planet, providing they are not overstretched, and providing that the mechanisms for obtaining them are not dependent upon some other hidden exploitation of non-renewable resource. Of course, a pedant would say that the sun's radiation won't go on for ever, but that's irrelevant, because the cause of it ending is not due to us using it up. And there's no reason to think that the wind or tidal power is limited (so long

as we have oceans and an atmosphere). Was it Donald Trump who thought we shouldn't have wind turbines because they would use up all the wind?

Read: (Laughs). I wonder, though, whether you've really got clear what exactly you mean by growing the cultural and artistic productivity. Do you envisage cultural production increasing indefinitely with no consequent environmental depredation? You can't mean just that people will be making better symphonies, better books—because increases in quality don't directly translate into increases in GDP. As we've already seen, GDP does not measure the true *value* of anything.

Rowett: Well, here's one possible way in which quality might increase quantity. Nation A might increase its GDP at the expense of Nation B, by having higher quality books, resulting in improved exports to Nation B.

Read: Yes, but that's not resulting in an overall increase in GDP for *everyone*. There's no *overall* GDP gain, from quality alone.

Rowett: Unless the improvement in quality means a higher uptake of the goods because people want more?

Read: But that's about quantity again, rather than quality. Any way of selling more would produce that, regardless of whether they are any good.

Rowett: I suppose the higher quality artistic goods might command a higher overall price, perhaps replacing some other less desirable and more destructive commodity as the entertainment of choice. For instance, attending live music might replace watching cheap television, whereupon the higher value of the replacement commodity would yield a higher market value from the consumption of the same amount of entertainment. So that would count as an increase in monetary value (measured as increased economic activity) which could potentially be achieved without any increase in the use of resources, or even with a decrease.

Read: But assuming a one-for-one substitution, where a high-quality-high-price choice replaces a low-quality low-price choice, the growth could continue only so long. At some point, the replacement process would evidently come to an end.

Rowett: How so?

Read: Well, I was supposing that there inevitably comes a point when the low price choice is completely

replaced, once everyone has gone for the better kind. And then there's no remaining market for the new product. And also the monetary value of the high quality productions clearly can't increase for ever; so increasing the quality and raising the price can't produce unlimited growth. And people won't indefinitely continue to choose ever higher quality at an ever higher price, given that price is a measure of relative worth; even if in principle the quality could potentially be indefinitely improved. I mean, could any theatre ticket, however stellar the show, be worth as much as a million nourishing meals? So, beyond a certain point at which the price and quality had reached a plateau of affordability, it seems to me that any further growth in the longer term would have to be a result of increasing the *number* of these high-quality high-price choices.

Rowett: OK, well perhaps there could be a continued increase by way of marketing an ever greater *quantity* of these high quality forms of arts entertainment, such as symphonies or books. Perhaps people could be encouraged to indulge in more of these, rather than paying more per item? One can never have too many books, I'd say! So all we need to do is produce more good new books, and people will buy more: one a day, two a day and so on.

Read: But look, the idea of achieving growth like that quickly becomes absurd. I have no time to read (most of) the books I have *now*, nor to listen to and enjoy the music I 'own'. You're now envisaging a population completely overwhelmed with superabundant quantities of unappreciated acquisitions. The mountains of unread books and unheard music would quickly become distressing rather than satisfying. There's no future in that project, even if you could devise ways of multiplying these commodities without denuding the earth of its resources, which I sincerely doubt you can.

Rowett: Fair enough. Well how about this then? Suppose the growth were to come from marketing the works of art to more and more people, not in multiplying copies but having more engagement. Surely this works, at least up to a point: we can widen the participation, bring new listeners into the concert hall, new readers into the library—people who would otherwise have been in the pub or at the cinema, or whatever.

Read: But again there's a saturation point, beyond which further growth would come only with population growth.

Rowett: OK, well let's add population growth and do it that way then.

Read: But that won't work. Endless population growth is also incompatible with conserving resources on a finite planet.

Rowett: Right, so here are some conclusions I think you will accept. First, we can imagine replacing existing damaging ways of spending leisure time with new ones that are culturally better and less resource-hungry, and in that way we can easily imagine achieving levels of productivity similar to what we now have, but with less damaging results. That is, we could achieve better quality of life with less damage to the planet. Secondly, arguably, on the basis of what we've just said, *some* growth in consumption—and hence in the production— of the creative arts *could be* achieved for a finite time, without increasing use of non-renewable resources, so within the limits of our planetary constraints. By changing from a culture engrossed in video-games to a culture engaged in face-to-face story-telling, we might massively increase the quality of life, at the same time as making significant savings on energy and on the kind of mineral resources that are required for high-tech equipment. We could then grow the production and consumption of not-for-profit face-to-face story-telling in the community; we could even have substantial growth over the long term in that activity. But it wouldn't be a growth in marketable commodities such as make for a higher economic turnover. Instead we'd be replacing costly forms of entertainment and arts with forms that are essentially free to the consumer and presented for no profit by the provider, because they're the traditional community entertainments that have been prized in human culture from millennia before the idea that the best things in life were bought with money.

Read: Is there a reason why you're stressing the not-for-profit provision of these services?

Rowett: Yes, it's a point we'll come to in a minute. It has to do with the concept of commodification.

Read: Still it seems to me there's a limit on the growth you're describing. Unless there are unlimited examples of such potential changes from one kind of costly entertainment to another more sustainable one, the process of growing the low resource products to replace the higher resource products seems likely to be repeatable only a limited number of times. Then it would surely reach a plateau where no further growth in demand or quality follows from that kind of change.

Rowett: You may be right, but I don't see that there is anything that logically necessitates that. After all, there may be a never ending creativity bringing into play new extravagant forms of entertainment that need to be cut out in favour of less demanding ones!

Read: Hmm, but that sees growth as coming only from the replacement of endless new forms of idiocy… In any case, here's another snag for you. You're imagining cultural production reaching larger and larger audiences. But I want to know exactly how this happens. As far as I can see it's got to be either, (a), via in-person encounters, such as attending the theatre, listening to a story teller, or

going to a concert or festival, or (b) via the production of hardcopy books, printed music, recorded disks and other physical media, or (c) via distance media, and information-technology, such as broadcasting, internet connections and satellite. In virtually all of these cases, we're talking of things that have real and perhaps increasing footprint, since making and transporting books is not currently carbon neutral, nor is travelling with, or to, a symphony orchestra. Could these things be done without placing a strain on any finite resources?

Rowett: Well that's where I disagree with you again. I agree that right now most of those things have a hefty carbon footprint. But that's because we live *after* the industrial revolution and we assume that transport uses fossil fuels. Think instead of a world where transport is genuinely done by wind power as it was in the great civilisations of the past, and where paper is dried by the sun and stitched with linen thread grown on land fertilised by composted peelings. There's no *necessary connection* between cultural exchange and the use of non-renewable resources, though I grant you that the world in which that connection is properly broken is not one that could be easily reinvented at the moment. Though I have to say that it is the world we have to reinvent. And I think we would be happier and better off for doing so.

Read: I think we mustn't depart into fantasy-land that quickly, though perhaps after the approaching apocalypse things will be very different. Coming back to the here and now, think about the way that our current capitalist system depends on building obsolescence into all technological products, since continuing profits to the company depend upon the consumers repeatedly buying new "upgraded" versions of the existing machines, instead of making do with the current (already adequate) equipment. Ever larger servers are needed to store our digital media,[24] and vast resources are consumed in the making of every new generation of i-phones and i-pads, in part because it's in the manufacturers' interests to increase the complexity and size of files, and to change the operating systems and format of files and storage devices, so as to ensure that the existing equipment periodically has to be replaced by newer and larger models. That's a kind of law of economics that's constantly driving waste and demand.

Rowett: That's right. In a non-capitalist economy the effect could certainly be reduced, but I'm not sure whether it could be eliminated, because it's related to the need to provide employment to those with the skills that service that industry, and also to the onward pressure of 'technological progress' that helps drive 'growth'. It's part and parcel of the twin obsession with jobs and "progress" (understood as production of useless goods for market).

Read: Also we mustn't forget the rare metals that are integral to information technology devices and

[24] See the evidence and reports cited by Clark, D. and Berners-Lee 2010, drawing on Berners-Lee 2010.

batteries.[25] So the idea of culture delivered by digital media is pretty-much impossible to imagine with no demand for finite commodities. And here's another issue you'll have to address. As things stand, producers market their goods to a public encouraged to desire novelty. People are deliberately being programmed to keep wanting new and different stuff.

Rowett: I think that could gradually be changed: it's largely produced by advertising and I reckon it could similarly be changed by advertising, though I agree it would take some time to alter those expectations. By reducing or eliminating that demand to have a new product long before the old one is worn out, we could create an economy without growth and without waste (or with less waste).

Read: Yes, but now we are back to the other model, that is to the desirability of a zero-growth mode of enjoying life. What you've now described are changes to our economy and society that move it in the direction of making it more sustainable, but, not accidentally, they are also turning out to be changes *away from economic growth.* You were supposed to be showing how we could still pursue growth, but what you have really done is show that we could get more of the things we enjoy and celebrate if we don't keep getting more and more produced and marketed. We've found a better society but it's *not* a 'growing' economy!

Rowett: Well you're right that we're back to the idea that we don't need the growth in order to have the success. We both agree on that. But my "devil's advocate" task was only to show that some kind of growth could be in principle compatible with a good life within the limits of the planet.

Read: Still it looks to me as if there's a good chance of *inverse* correlation, in fact, between growth and wellbeing.

Rowett: And another thing to notice—the point we left hanging above— is that, crucially, not everything *should* be commodified. When I insisted that the story-telling is not for profit, that's to reflect the fact that it's only because the face-to-face storytelling in a family or community is *not* offered at a price that it's priceless. Entertainment that's freely given and freely enjoyed is a peculiarly precious source of happiness. There are some things, such as care, friendship, and mutual trust that don't have a price, can't be bought and sold. If we measure the success of society in terms of those things, success won't have a price tag: to put a price on it is to destroy the very thing that was being valued.

[25] For an accessible discussion of this problem and references to some sources of evidence, see Cho 2012.

Read: That's a profoundly important point. I think what you're saying is that there are just a few things that might potentially be viable candidates for endless expansion without generating harmful ecological footprints (e.g. live novel recitations, narrations or performances; and similarly, also, beautiful views, the weather, etc.). But it's precisely those things that are most vulnerable to being ruined if they become commodified.

Rowett: And if they are not commodified then, obviously, they are not part of GDP. And hence, because a healthy society will resist the commodification of precisely those artistic and natural phenomena most able to flourish in endless novelty, the attempt to capture those phenomena in GDP, and to pursue them for the sake of their economic returns, ipso facto threatens to damage or kill them.

Further considerations to the effect that there is a contingent but unavoidable link.

Read: I'll concede that it's easy to imagine a culture which values art more than ours does, or one where people devote more time, energy and money to live music, theatre and poetry. And I'll concede that such a live-arts culture could, in principle, achieve a low carbon footprint for a considerable increase in such activity. But I don't think I share your view about what follows from that. For my part I find it hard to imagine any society achieving significant *growth* in productivity in the arts without also making demands for energy and transport that would outstrip what renewable resources would supply.

Rowett: I think where we differ is mainly over whether that's necessarily *impossible* or only contingent (and highly improbable in practice). I'm saying the difficulty is contingent and is due to the way we organise our society and its mobility. And I think you're forgetting that not all the resources are finite, and some are self-regenerating. Wind, waves, sun, tides—these are all infinite resources and you can harness more of them without reducing anyone's access to their fair share now or in the future.

Read: Yes, but there are very few methods of *harnessing* those resources or exploiting them effectively without collateral damage and costs. The advanced devices that are currently used to convert wind, wave, tide, water, solar or geothermal energy to electricity are not free, nor (as currently constructed) are they made without exploiting finite resources.

Rowett: But that too is surely a matter of contingent practicality rather than necessity. Windmills and waterwheels can be constructed of wood (as they were in the past), and there is no reason why bicycles and other treadmill systems shouldn't be made of recycled or renewable materials.

Read: But recycling isn't cost free! It's true that metal and glass can in principle be recycled over and over,[26] but there's a very considerable energy-drain—or material-throughput— consequent upon an economy focused on recycling or high-tech-renewables. There are some who'd wheel in the law of entropy at this point, to cast doubt on the idea that there could be unlimited production without denuding the planet, even with effective reuse of finite materials; indeed I suspect they're right, so I'd be interested to know, what's you're response to that? And what's certainly true is that every time metal is recycled (let alone glass), there's an inevitable loss of energy. Arguably this scuppers the idea of an unending 'circular economy'.

Rowett: But no such objection applies to organic materials. They can be recycled by organic processes without loss of energy, since energy is constantly taken in from the sun to support the continuation of the process. We may have to find new ways of creating solutions (or perhaps rediscover old ways) that depend more on genuinely renewable resources.

Read: Let's see where we are now. I think I'd agree with you there that one might conceivably in principle be able to imagine an economy achieving a small amount of harmless long term growth by harnessing primarily organic processes; but I think you'd also agree that such an economy is too far removed from our present techno-fixated economy to be a realistic expectation here and now. It would only become possible, from where we are now, with huge *degrowth* first. And since it would be far less productive, using slower and less intense sources of energy, I think we'd have to suppose that the main aim of such a society would be simply to live and do well at a lower level of productivity: to achieve, if you like, *more wellbeing* by way of *negative growth* (that is, by a substantial shrinkage of the economy and of productivity). So it wouldn't illustrate a good society that was benefiting from growth. Rather a good society that was benefiting from sustainable wellbeing and a reduced obsession with destructive practices!

Short term growth in some sector is compatible with reduced drain on resources.

Rowett: There's one other thing we ought to consider before we conclude that there's nothing to be said for economic growth. Could it be that growth in some sector is worth pursuing, perhaps in order to achieve sustainable degrowth overall? I'm thinking that it might be desirable to pursue some growth, *in some sectors,* or *in some areas,* if that doesn't just avoid depleting the resources but could actually reduce demand for non-renewable resources. For example, suppose that one country's economy grows at the expense of another's, where the growing economy is a low-carbon economy and the losing one is based on mining non-renewable materials. Then the net

[26]For the classic and still largely definitive treatment of these matters, see Georgescu-Roegen 1971.

result will be a slower rate of depletion globally. And another example would be when growth results from replacing poor and costly degrading technologies with better more lasting and sustainable ones, even within one country, or when growth in one sector of the economy is accompanied by shrinkage in another (as for example if bicycles and trains replace cars and lorries). In those cases the growth is compatible with an improvement rather than a worsening in the overall rate of damage to the planet. It seems to me that growth without damage in these circumstances is easy to imagine, and that makes me doubt that the relation between growth and exhaustion of planetary resources is as quite as close – quite as *immediate* – as you want to suggest.

Read: But you'd broadly agree that it's impossible to envisage *net* growth that continues *indefinitely* year on year within a purely green economy?[27] I mean, constant *net* global green growth is clearly a very different matter from green growth *in some particular sector* (e.g. in the renewable energy sector) or place (e.g. around the East Anglian coast). It's those micro-areas of growth that you're bringing in now. I think I can agree that those are unproblematic (aside from their inevitable use of finite resources in the building). But the former is arguably impossible. If we grow (for example) renewables, then we have to shrink some other impact, to compensate — remembering that there is no impact- or footprint-free human activity—

Rowett:— except perhaps for some organic *completely* renewable-based technology—

Read: —which would need to be more or less paleolithic, in terms of its ecology, wouldn't it?

Rowett: Paleolithic? You're choosing a term with negative connotations, but we could talk about 21st century methods (methods that finally and not before time relearn some of the skills of our ancestors who knew how to live in accord with their local environment)!

Read: Well, for my part I can't see the link between increasing GDP and increasing footprint ever being severed completely. I don't see how in practice growth could ever be wholly "dematerialised "or "angelised".[28]

[27] See again my work in Read 2014 for detailed argumentation. And also the earlier bit of our discussion above (on limits to growth in a potentially 'green' sector such as the arts).
[28] I've already has defended some parts of this view in Read 2011. See also Tim Jackson's work.

3. Conclusion

Rowett: This second part of our conversation, over lunch, has been fascinating. Whereas we were in easy agreement on the question of whether growth is a good thing in itself, and agreed that it is not, on the issue of principle as to whether (desirable or not) any kind of growth is *possible* without self-destruction—and whether it could in principle continue indefinitely and remain sustainable— on that we haven't reached so much agreement.

Read: No. I don't think I've completely persuaded you on this latter point, because of course you are right that there are some 'resources' that are not depleted as a result of using them; and the issue is then whether anything can be done with them that doesn't additionally require the input or extraction of finite resources. But I think what has become pretty clear, and easy to agree on, is that growth is not something we can ever blithely take for granted as a way to make things better. We've explored two powerful and complementary reasons for thinking that the ideology that promotes growth as a measure of success is entirely missing the point.

Rowett: Yes, this much should be absolutely clear: growth is never a measure of success. We've found no reason to think that growth as such ever delivers anything worth having, and in most cases, it actually depletes and damages almost everything that is truly necessary for human life, let alone the good life on a healthy planet, which must surely be among our prime goals.

Read: As things stand, an unexamined commitment to economic growth seems to be driving an outdated political ideology, leading to a permanent sense of dissatisfaction with the good things that we have, and a constant expectation of more.

Rowett: But it's really worthwhile to put this in historical perspective. That ideology has far less of a historical pedigree than one might naively imagine. It's never been the basis of any of the great civilisations of the past, prior to the modern western culture that is taken as normative today. If we make the good life for a long-lived society on a healthy planet our primary goal, we certainly need to reassess what kinds of technologies, farming practices, forestry practices and industries we promote. We shouldn't move away from the old methods of growing sustainable crops on a well-maintained soil with a healthy bio-system that regenerates naturally. We probably need increased benign government control of the built infrastructure and transport systems, and institutions (including, crucially, educational institutions) that support sustainable practices. This can't be done by dogmatically free market systems. It needs to be done collectively, by a society that places long-term well-being at the top of its priorities.

Read: It's true that some areas of growth in "green" and sustainable technologies may be desirable in the short to medium term, to complement a sharp reduction in *other* kinds of productivity, but that crazy idea of endless growth in something non-destructive that you were pushing is just way off the point, since growing *production* adds nothing of value in itself, and has this unholy link to destructive consequences—which you've more or less conceded even though you don't think the connection is one of entailment.

Rowett: No. I think what would be beneficial, instead of pursuing growth for its own sake, would be to find ways in which we can enhance and increase the more integrated organic modes of productivity, in order to facilitate a transition to a better or more worthy life, with the chance for true flourishing of civilisation in those areas of human life that actually make us what we are: as creative and thinking creatures with relationships that are literally vital to us and with a joy in beauty and excellence. The longer we go on measuring GDP-growth as if it were a proxy for what is worth having,[29] the longer we continue to miss out on, or even to destroy, all that truly matters to us as human beings.[30]

Read: I couldn't agree more. It's been good to run into you Catherine. I hope we can continue our conversation tomorrow! I have to run off to a meeting now – because we still work in an institution obsessed with models brooded from business! – but I have to say that unhurried face-to-face conversations like this, among the chestnut trees and by the water, must be part of the human civilisation that's worth rediscovering…[31]

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[29] Read 2011 argues that we need a criterion for what counts as genuine progress: GDP will not serve. For development of this point, see also Read 2016.

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[31] Many thanks to Peter Kramer for extensive comments on an earlier draft.

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Part Two: Brexit, the EU, and Trade

2. We must localise the EU and curb corporate power - but does that mean in or out? [2016]

Helena Norberg-Hodge, Rupert Read and Thomas Wallgren decry the contemporary form of the EU: principally, a means of creating a single market for the benefit of multinational corporations and banks, in the process dissolving meaningful, localized democratic politics and culture. In place of the contemporary EU, the authors call for a relocalised yet unified Europe, a path divergent from both the conservative-isolationist, and liberal pro-EU, positions. This article appeared originally in *The Ecologist*.

Most voices in favour of Brexit seem to offer little more than narrow nationalism, xenophobia and racism.

Such associations make it feel impossible for most Greens and progressive thinkers on the left to vote Leave in the upcoming UK referendum.

And that settles it in the minds of some: one 'has' to vote Remain. Anything else feels 'unprogressive', reactionary, even downright dangerous.

However, there are powerful arguments against the European *Economic* Union. In all five Nordic countries: Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Finland and Denmark, we have had a very powerful critique of the EU from an ecological, cultural, global solidarity and democratic perspective.

A large proportion of the population realised that the impetus to link countries together was primarily based on a misguided notion of economic growth. However, these arguments didn't reach the English-speaking world, and today on both sides of the debate in Britain this misguided notion continues to prevail.

In order to make sense of misleading pro and con arguments in the media, we need to go behind the scenes to examine the issues holistically. We need to look carefully at the process of economic 'integration' that has been going on for several generations now around the world.

At the regional, national and global level, societies and ecosystems have been transformed in order to accelerate economic growth. The emphasis has been on increasing international trade and benefits to international traders, at great cost to ecosystems, livelihoods, and democracy. It is important to understand the formation of the EU in this context, but by no means do the points we make here apply to the EU alone.

The EU is dedicated to corporate interests and economic globalisation

The European Union is an extension of the Bretton Woods institutions - The World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT).

It is widely assumed that the European Union was formed in order to prevent conflict and in order to avoid another depression. In the aftermath of the Second World War, political elites and business leaders promoted the notion that economic integration was a path to peace and harmony.

But in fact, the result was, a form of economic development - based on debt, global trade and consumerism - that systematically undermined democracy and favoured corporate interests while hollowing out local economies worldwide.

Interlinked multinational banks and corporations constitute a 'de facto' European government, determining economic activity through the 'European market'. Their vast lobbying power has an overwhelming influence on the EU Commission and the secretive Council. Corporations run Europe.

In country after country, transnational corporations (TNCs) have been able to evade taxes by 'offshoring' their activities, and to bargain for lower tax rates and higher subsidies by threatening to move where even less in taxes will be demanded, and more in subsidies provided.

Economic integration imposes human and ecological monoculture

Europe is home to a great variety of cultures, languages and customs. The economic union is based on an economic model that is eroding this diversity, which was born of human adaptation to different climates and ecological realities. A fabric consisting of mutually enriching and different cultural traditions is being replaced by the uniform culture of consumerist 'individualism'.

Previously, the many borders, currencies, and differing regulations made trade difficult for big business, while the diversity of languages and traditions put limits on mass marketing. None of these were obstacles to businesses operating within their own countries - in fact, the borders and cultural diversity helped protect the markets of domestic producers from the predations of mobile capital, helping to ensure their survival.

But for big corporations and financial institutions, diversity is an impediment, whereas monoculture - in all aspects of life, from seeds, fast food and clothing, to architecture - is 'efficient'. For them, a single Europe-wide market of 500 million people was an essential step to further growth: *their* growth.

Meeting that goal required a single currency, 'harmonized' regulations, the elimination of borders, and centralised management of the European economy.

The EU economy increases pollution and CO_2 emissions

The global economic model promoted in the EU increases pollution and fossil fuel use in a multitude of ways.

- First of all, economic policies are responsible for a concentration of jobs in ever-larger high-rise urban centres. When people move into urban areas, net resource and energy consumption tends to rise, massively increasing CO_2 emissions and toxic pollution.
- Secondly, the EU subsidies system not only wipes out family farms but paves the way for agribusinesses that destroy soils and ecosystems, or employ cruel factory farming methods.
- Thirdly, investments in infrastructure and fossil fuel subsidies help to prop up the energy-intensive system of mass production for mass consumption. Moreover, most energy subsidies tend to support highly centralised power systems, rather than more decentralised renewable energy.

Even worse is 'redundant trade': in a typical year, Britain exports millions of litres of milk and thousand of tonnes of wheat and lamb, while importing nearly identical amounts. The cod caught off the coast of Scotland is shipped 5,000 miles to be turned into fillets in China, then shipped back again.

This kind of wasteful trade - which greatly overshadows the efforts of well-meaning individuals to reduce their personal carbon footprints - actually benefits no one but massive corporations. And it is not efficiency but a wide range of subsidies and ignored costs that make it all possible.

National governments stripped of political power

At the same time as governments subsidise big business, they must pay from their depleted treasuries to retrain displaced workers, to mend the unraveling social fabric, and to clean up the despoiled environments left behind by deregulated, mobile corporations.

Forced to go hat-in-hand to banks, countries can easily find themselves on a downward spiral, with interest payments consuming an increasing proportion of national output. It's no wonder that so many governments today are struggling to stay afloat, while global corporations and banks are flush with cash.

This has left nation-states increasingly powerless to deliver what people need. They have lost the power to protect their citizens from the impacts of international capital and financial speculation. As a result, many people have lost confidence in governments and democracy itself. They feel disenfranchised and angered by the escalation of inequality-driven by international market forces and rootless, profit-hungry corporations, with the full complicity of the EU.

This is a dangerous situation, ripe for exploitation by extremist forces, including those of atavism and of outright fascism.

European government is not the answer

Many idealists see the EU as a political bloc that has raised environmental and human rights standards continentally and globally, and acted as a buffer to the US. There is much truth in this. And to greatly strengthen pan-European collaboration with the aim of solving our global ecological and human rights problems is clearly highly desirable.

However, this type of collaboration does not need to - ought not to be allowed to - erode the rights of smaller nation states to run their own affairs under clearly negotiated agreements of environmental protection. We hold that the relatively high standards in the EU have been a consequence of the integrity of the democracies in many of the constituent countries, not a consequence of creating a single market that benefits big business.

We would also argue that to assess the overall contribution by the EU to global environment and human rights affairs we must not look exclusively at the relatively benign EU policies in these areas themselves but also at the consequences for ecological justice of EU policies in trade and military policy.

In fact, the main impetus behind the European Economic Union was the desire of big business to compete with the US. And to a great extent, what we have today is a nascent United States of Europe, competing with the US about market shares but also working closely together with the US in preserving the hegemony of the global North over the global South.

European democracy? If only ...

Meanwhile, within the EU, the public has very little power and ability to affect decisions. There is no common public sphere where European citizens can get together to, muster democratic control of the European economy and the administrative power concentrated in Brussels.

The European Parliament is weak, and, more importantly, elections to it work mostly on a national-level basis. There are no real European political parties and movements. Thus the

situation is even worse than it is at the national level: for at least at the national level there is a public, a citizenry, a demos, a press, a political debate.

It might appear that the solution is to remove power from national governments and give it to a democratically-controlled European government. There is something completely understandable about this impulse. After all, there is a real need for international co-operation around the political and ecological crises gripping our planet.

But scaling up government means increasing the distance between civic society and their representatives. It would be a step backward to to create a 'European democracy', a federal superstate of Europe. Such a government would be virtually incapable of responding to the diverse needs of half a billion people.

Democratic institutions need to operate at a level that is comprehensible and accessible to people: at a *human* scale. We must take seriously the possibility that global democracy - people's urge to care for the globe and for all its citizens - can only be real if most functions are local and people's dependence on global trade and institutions is limited.

When presented by continent- and global-level problems caused by businesses and untrammelled markets, let's increase international collaboration with the goal of scaling *down* businesses and markets. This form of collaboration is fundamentally different from scaling up government. It points in the opposite direction!

The following point is then at the heart of the very challenging position we find ourselves in: there is a profound *mismatch* between politics at the national level, and economics at the international level. Many well-intentioned 'progressive' / green / 'Left' people and organisations across the continent believe the best response to this problem is to create a true (rather than a merely *de facto*) European government. Yet this is likely to merely amplify the control already exerted by corporations over the European economy.

The answer, instead, is to decentralise the European economy. This will enable us to shape economic activity to reduce waste and resource consumption while providing meaningful livelihoods and restoring the environment,. Through decentralisation and relocalisation we reassert democratic control over our own destinies.

The way forward: localisation

There *is* an alternative to undermining our own people in order to enrich foreign corporations and banks. It's called 'localisation' and it involves moving away from ever more specialised production for export, towards prioritising diversified production to meet people's genuine

needs; away from centralised, corporate control, towards more decentralised, local and national economies.

This means encouraging greater regional self-reliance, and using our taxes, subsidies and regulations to support enterprises embedded in society, rather than transnational monopolies.

A shift away from the global towards the local is the most strategic way to tackle our escalating social and ecological crises. Localisation shortens the distance between producers and consumers by encouraging diversified production for domestic needs, instead of specialised production for export.

Localisation does not mean eliminating international trade, or reducing all economic activity to a village level. It's about shifting the power from transnational corporations to democratically accountable entities, including nation states. At the same time we need to build up regional and local self-reliance. It's about reclaiming power over our lives while simultaneously shrinking our ecological footprint.

Localisation - the benefits

In contrast with the make-believe of derivatives and debt-based money, localisation is founded in real productivity for genuine human needs, with respect for the rich diversity of cultures and ecosystems worldwide.

By shortening the distance between production and consumption, localisation minimises transport, packaging, and processing - thereby cutting down on waste, pollution, and greenhouse gas emissions. This simultaneously increases resilience, which will be needed to cope with the inevitable crises coming our way.

Localised economies rely more on human labour and creativity and less on energy-intensive technological systems. This increases the number of jobs while reducing the use of natural resources.

By spreading economic and political power among millions of individuals and small businesses rather than a handful of corporate monopolies, localisation provides the potential for revitalising the democratic process. Political power is no longer some distant impersonal force, but is instead rooted in community.

As the scale and pace of economic activity are reduced, anonymity gives way to face-to-face relationships, and to a closer connection to Nature. This in turn leads to a more secure sense of personal and cultural identity.

Localisation is a remarkable solution-multiplier - but it should not be mistaken for a complete panacea. It offers no guarantee for peace and ecological wellbeing. Going local needs to be pursued in full awareness of the need for environmental and human rights protection that goes beyond local, regional and national borders. It's a prerequisite, a necessity in order to build the accountable structures we need that respect and renew diversity.

Localisation, or decentralisation, was central to the thinking of the people's movements in the Nordic countries that have resisted full integration into the EU. In Norway, the economic and political elites twice tried to achieve EU-membership and were defeated, thanks to the campaigns for democracy and global responsibility for environment and justice.

In Denmark and Sweden, membership in the Eurozone has been rejected in several referenda after historic grassroots campaigns. In Iceland, the popular support for EU membership has always been weak. The first application for membership in the EU was submitted in 2009 but suspended in 2013 when the pro-membership government lost elections.

Think before you vote!

We are facing huge crises: the frightening spectre of climate change; the threat of nuclear annihilation; the enormous problems of hypermobility and large-scale migration ...

These are all consequences of a fixation on growth and technological 'progress'. The leadership in both Brexit and Remain are committed to promising more 'economic growth' to the millions of people who are struggling to hold on to a job, struggling to keep a roof over their heads.

The 'growth' that is being discussed is actually supporting excessive global trade and global businesses and banks. The very same process is handing over more wealth and power to the 1%, to the detriment of the 99%. And this type of growth demands ever-more energy for global infrastructures, including bigger airports, ports and super-highways.

So we have a system that destroys livelihoods while driving up CO_2 emissions and other forms of pollution. More and more people, including Nobel laureate economists, are questioning this path.

There are some who would believe that collaboration at the pan-European level could facilitate a path to genuine economic decentralisation. Others are convinced that we can best take those steps to localise if we first leave the EU. Others still don't favour either of these paths. We are not trying to tell the reader how (or even whether) to vote; we are asking you to help us shed light on and bring sanity to this volatile situation.

Whichever way you vote, please reject the glaringly stupid rhetoric in the media. Speak out, let *your* voice be heard for ecological and economic sanity, for a fundamental turnaround.

3. Take back real control! A Green response to Brexit [2016]

The winning Brexit slogan was 'Take Back Control', write Victor Anderson & Rupert Read. But leaving the EU will only increase the power of corrupt elites unless the UK reforms its own democratic governance, combats the excessive power of corporations, upholds the rights of all its citizens, decentralises its economy, and forges progressive alliances with its European partners. This article appeared originally in *The Ecologist*.

The loss of the referendum is likely to be a big setback for Green and Left political voices in England and Wales - unless creative ways of responding to it are found. In this short piece, we explore ten such ways:

1. A 'progressive pact'. As many are now recognising, there is now a crying need for a 'Progressive Pact', to bring together those determined not to allow Brexit to entrench the power of the Right.

In Green House think-tank we will be asking questions to both Green and Labour leadership candidates in the coming weeks as to whether they are willing to see the writing on the wall (for electoral politics as usual) - and instead to sign up to negotiations for such a pact. (See our briefing on the topic)

2. Taking back real control. The successful slogan of the Leave campaign was 'Take back control'. We ought to call this bluff, and get serious about really taking back control. This would mean PR, Lords reform, economic democracy, real devolution within England, and much more ... At every turn, let's call for democracy to be made real in this country!

3. A new deal that recognises real concerns on immigration. We should get on the front foot in seeking a new deal for UK with Europe - something like what Norway has but bargaining some movement of labour restrictions in return for some loss of single market access. Any forces on the Left / Green wings of politics who continue to deny that most people in Britain are determined to end EU open-door migration policies are consigning themselves to the dustbin of history (see (5) below).

4. Reinventing Europe for people, not corporations. A bold possibility, depending partly on the response to Brexit in other countries, would be to Reinvent Europe - including shrinking the single currency area - with the aim of the UK going back into a reformed EU in due course (into a non-Eurozone 'outer circle'). Such a possibility should now be actively considered, as Colin Hines has recently argued here on The Ecologist.

5. Protection for people. There must be protection for the rights of EU citizens currently living in the UK, rather than leaving them in uncertainty until negotiations are concluded in over two years time. However, it is also absolutely essential that we understand the concern with immigration, that we

don't abuse all Leavers (over half of voters!) as racists, and that we accept withdrawal from unrestricted free movement of labour.

The main drivers of migration are neoliberalism, Middle Eastern wars, manmade climate change, and the consequences of the European single currency. We need to address each of these root causes seriously, but also, meantime, not place on the ordinary working people of this country the burden of having to cope with the effects.

6. Localising economies. It is time to promote a positive version of anti-globalisation: against unrestricted rule of the market, and for greater localisation. It's time to make protecting things a clean word, a good word, again - for 'protectionism' to go progressive.

Brexit may provide an unexpected opportunity for this, because the UK's trade relations will have to be renegotiated. As part of this, the UK should refuse to accept anything on the lines of the proposed TTIP trade deal, and look instead to a more localised economic future whose survival is not subject to the whims of international finance.

7. Planetary environmental governance. It's time for global governance for planetary boundaries, tackling global environmental issues that know no frontiers, issues such as dangerous climate change and biodiversity loss, through stronger global arrangements, and with the Bretton Woods economic institutions (World Bank, IMF, WTO) integrated into UN system rather than operating separately outside - and frequently undermining - it.

8. Raising standards on environment and social protection. Whilst new negotiations with the EU are taking place, Parliament should retain EU environmental & social protections in UK law. Crucial examples here are the Precautionary Principle and the Habitats Directive.

Moreover, it is also crucial that we don't make the mistake of keeping as part of UK law without modifying flawed EU directives. Brexit provides a potential opportunity to correct serious errors, such as the madly easy ride that the EU has given to agrofuels ('biofuels'). The EU Renewable Energy directive should be improved to rectify this error: this is something concrete and positive to lobby for.

9. Brexit does not give the Right a mandate! The referendum only resolves one issue: We must resist at every turn the assumption being made in some quarters that The Right and anti-green forces now have any sort of general mandate.

10. Media reform. Systematic dis-information is inevitable whilst *Sun* and *Daily Mail* are the two best-selling papers and TV takes its agenda largely from them. The referendum campaign showed the British media at its worst, and showed how hateful rhetoric can flourish in such a dreadful environment.

One concrete way to provide the groundwork for a 'progressive pact' would be for Labour, LibDems, Greens, SNP and Plaid to sign up to strong proposals for media reform in this country, proposals that were similar to each other's.

These ten lessons, these ten action-points, together provide, we believe, a way for us to go onto the front foot now, rather than endlessly onto the defensive. A way of putting our collective best foot forward ...

4. Alternative Brexit? Could this be the change the Greens have been waiting for? [2017]

Victor Anderson & Rupert Read call for an 'Alternative Brexit:' rather than jumping into the economic arms of the United States, or seeking trade deals with countries in which the UK will have far less negotiating leverage now outside the EU, a new, G/green way forward should be sought which is both ecologically regenerative and socio-economically localised. This article appeared originally in *The Ecologist*.

The triggering of Article 50 earlier this week starts a new phase in the arguments about Brexit. The various negotiations that are now going to take place will in a big way determine what sort of country the UK becomes - and even whether it continues to exist at all.

Several different types of future are possible. The ones already on the political agenda are easy to outline:

(1) The UK does a deal with Trump's America to become effectively the 51st state - lowering environmental, labour, and corporate standards in order to get a deal done.

(2) The UK pursues the fantasy of 'Empire 2.0' but finds that Australia, Canada, India, Nigeria and the rest have all found different places in world trade that don't require them to link back to Britain.

(3) The UK has a deal with the EU that creates a 'soft Brexit' that divides the Tory Party and ends up not changing much except for costing money and cutting Britain out of influencing the decision-making.

(4) The UK gets no deal at all. The subsequent public revolt, and Parliament or a new referendum, ends up choosing not to go ahead with Brexit. Loss of face for Theresa May and cries of anger from the hard Right but sighs of relief from many other people.

(5) England and Wales go ahead with Brexit but Scotland breaks away and Northern Ireland joins up with the Irish Republic, staying in the EU.

Those are the options being talked about now. But we have written a new report Brexit Trade published by Molly Scott Cato, a Green Member of the European Parliament, that puts forward a different alternative: an 'alternative Brexit'.

We have assumed in our report that Brexit does go ahead and asked how it could be made a success if we face up to the reality that any trade deals done by the UK with larger economic blocs are bound to be one-sided once we are no longer negotiating as part of the EU. In these circumstances, the rational response is to see if the UK's dependence on international trade can be reduced.

This in turn would depend on developing a UK economy with greater national self-reliance, deliberately building up economic sectors which can make substitutes for goods that would otherwise be imported.

This of course is what many Greens, Transition activists and others have argued for over many years: a less globalised, more localised, economy, based on thriving local communities; one that would reduce the power of unaccountable multinational corporations and make "taking back control" of the economy realistically possible.

Like most things, this would be a matter of balance. Of course we don't advocate eliminating imports altogether. But it would involve abandoning the dogma that maximising international trade is necessarily a good thing, and recognising that globalisation needs to be tamed - in some ways democratised and in some ways reversed.

Our report sets this out, including the implications for the environment and migration, and the wider context of the arguments about neoliberalism and populism. We want to add a new flavour, a new colour, to the Brexit debate. Why not read our report for yourself: Brexit Trade.

5. How to save the Precautionary Principle: Some thoughts for Lords and Ladies [2018]

Rupert Read and Victor Anderson call for the statutory promulgation of the Precautionary Principle into UK Law, a step more needful now than ever, with the country's departure from the EU. This article appeared originally on *Medium*.

Introduction

What is the Precautionary Principle [PP]? The PP aims to ensure a high level of environmental protection through preventative decision-taking in the case of risk and particularly of uncertainty. It is applied in circumstances where there are reasonable grounds for concern that an activity could cause harm, but where there is uncertainty about the probability of the risk and the degree of harm and some gaps in the information currently available. The PP is a vital tool for defending humanity against itself, a way of having the humility of recognizing that we are living in a world that we will never fully

understand, let alone control. The PP has been recognised by various international agreements. The Bergen Declaration on Sustainable Development (1990) is a widely-accepted framing of the PP in international law. Its definition of the PP is: In order to achieve sustainable development, policies must be based on the precautionary principle. Environmental measures must anticipate, prevent and attack the causes of environmental degradation. Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty should not be used as a reason for postponing measures to prevent environmental degradation.

The current state of play

The Precautionary Principle has some legal status in the UK through its membership of the EU, because it is one of the EU's official environmental principles. However this will no longer be the case when (if?) the UK leaves the EU. The Government has agreed to start off Brexit by transferring all EU law into UK law. That leaves open the option of changing parts of it later, but at least that provides a useful starting-point. But it only applies to laws and not to principles, and therefore doesn't apply to the environmental principles or the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (which has principles on human rights and citizens' democratic rights). In both Houses of Parliament the Government has faced pressure — and amendments — on these issues. Most recently, members of the House of Lords debated Amendment 27, which would have put the environmental principles (and the principle of animal sentience) into UK law and required the Government to set up a new watchdog body to enforce these principles and environmental standards, such as those on air quality, replacing the current enforcement roles of the European Court of Justice and European Commission. The amendment wasn't put to a vote, because the minister responding to the debate, Lord Callanan, promised that the Government will come forward with its own proposals, and they will do this before the Lords potentially return to this issue on May 16, when they debate the Withdrawal Bill at Third Reading, before handing it back to the Commons for MPs to consider the changes the Lords have made. Peers backing the amendment decided to wait and see what the Government comes up with, giving themselves the option of debating a new amendment on May 16. The Government is almost certain to propose a new watchdog body on the lines Michael Gove has already committed himself to — apparently despite pressure from some other ministers. For example, the Department for Transport aren't keen on an effective enforcement body for air quality standards. However what the Government has not promised — and what was in Amendment 27 but not put to a vote — is giving statutory status to the EU's environmental principles, including the Precautionary Principle. The Government is proposing to put these principles into a National Policy Statement, which has lower standing in law than full-scale primary legislation, and can much more easily be changed by the Government. In particular, an NPS is vulnerable to being changed by an unenlightened future Secretary of State (and we shouldn't forget it is not long since the openly anti-environmentalist Owen Patterson held that position). It is important to challenge and wherever possible improve on the Government's proposals at every opportunity — including in the public consultation process, proceedings on the Withdrawal Bill, and the debates on the bill which will come forward — probably next year — to set up the new watchdog body and give it its objectives and duties. Meanwhile, the first line of defence for the PP now is the House of Lords.

What is to be done?

In a previous article, one of us (Read) urged that a minimum way forward for not discarding the PP would be to embed the environmental principles in an NPS that was statutorily required, and that the proposed environmental watchdog would have to have regard to. As noted in that article, Macrory and Thornton (2017) have observed: *The model of town and country planning legislation can provide a useful pointer where national government guidance and policy is contained in non-legal documents but given some explicit legal connection to the planning system. If environmental principles are to play a legal role, future environment legislation could adopt a similar model by incorporating them in government policy documents rather the legislation itself but then making a link to decision-making under the relevant legislation.* This provides some future for the Precautionary and other EU Principles. It appears that exactly this route is the one that the Secretary of State is favouring. This is better than nothing. But, as we noted above, it is a bare minimum only. It remains far less than ideal, because the content of the NPS is still highly vulnerable to change with the whims of ministers.

Ways to retain the Precautionary Principle more effectively than by means of a National Policy Statement.

Here are two possibilities, going further than what the Government now appears to be proposing. Either of these would be genuinely satisfactory ways of preserving and even enhancing the PP: 1) It's desirable for the precautionary principle to be enshrined in UK law that carries over existing EU legislation referring to it to ensure that decisions made under such legislation cannot be challenged in a UK court on the grounds that the hazard has not been scientifically-evidenced beyond reasonable doubt. The precautionary principle also needs to be enshrined in some way so that new UK legislation can be based on it. One way to do this would be through a comprehensive Environment Act. Possibility (1) however is clearly not Gove's intention. It embodies too much of a strong direct commitment to the environmental principles for the Conservative Government to stomach. So we suggest another possible option: 2) The statutory 'watchdog' that the Secretary of State Michael Gove is proposing should have the key environmental principles — especially the prevention principle (that prevention is better than cure) and the precautionary principle — **embedded explicitly in its duties**. Here is a rough draft text for such inclusion, *vis a vis* the Precautionary Principle: **The body shall exercise its functions in conformity with the following principles: ((a)) the precautionary principle, ((b))…** Amendment 27 debated in the Lords, however, went further still in one important respect. It would have applied the Precautionary Principle and the other EU environmental principles as duties on all public bodies, not just on the new environmental watchdog. **This** would be a way in which the future of the environmental principles was not only guaranteed but indeed strengthened.

Conclusion

The bottom-line is this. If the Government brings forth soon a consultation on a strong environmental watchdog, that's progress. But we need to have good reason to believe that that watchdog really will be enough. Our proposal (2) would be a way to make it enough. As Ruth Chambers says here, on the Green Alliance blog, warm words at this point are *not* enough. And in particular, we'd add this: that

what Lord Callanan is promising is IN ANY CASE not enough. For again, he is promising only an NPS to embody the environmental principles. But those principles *need* to be either directly in law ((1), above), and/or (and perhaps better still) in statute by way of framing the watchdog itself ((2), above). So: we would urge peers to reject whatever the Government comes up with between now and May 16, *unless* it embodies a real concession in this direction. Doing so would *strengthen* the hands of those who are seeking genuinely to save and even to strengthen the environmental principles. And that is exactly what is needed at this moment in history.

6. Brexit and the Precautionary Principle [2019]

Andy Ross and Rupert Read discuss the urgent need to utilize the precautionary principle to stave off all-too-probable environmental degradation stemming from the loosening of rules in the wake of Brexit. This article appeared originally in *Wildlife and Countryside Link*.

Boris Johnson is firmly committed to leaving the EU on October the 31st come hell or high water, deal or no deal. Although Parliament has legislated to prevent no deal, it is still a very real possibility, so long as this government remains in power. We must, therefore, examine what exiting on World Trade Organisation (WTO) rules might mean and its consequences for our principles, our country and our planet.

A threatened principle that currently offers UK citizens protection in the face of uncertain but credible danger, is the Precautionary Principle. As Victor Anderson and Rupert Read have explained, the Precautionary Principle "aims to ensure a high level of environmental protection through preventative decision-taking in the case of risk and particularly of uncertainty. It is applied in circumstances where there are reasonable grounds for concern that an activity could cause harm, but where there is uncertainty about the probability of the risk and the degree of harm and some gaps in the information currently available".

This principle is interwoven throughout EU decision making processes (though not as deeply as, arguably, it should be). Upon leaving the EU, this precautionary principle may be degraded with significant ramifications for the UK regarding climate change action, fracking and many other significant areas of ecological concern.

Negotiating trade deals with much larger nations (without the combined clout of the EU 27) could easily lead to a bonfire of standards, in order to try and rapidly achieve trade deals with countries that want the UK to lower regulations in order to create a 'level playing field'. Such an outcome could have potentially devastating consequences.

A high profile example of this is the potential for meat import standards to be bargained away in pursuit of a future free-trade deal with the US. But it is not just the threat of 'chlorinated chicken' – and the poor farming hygiene standards that this practice can hide. – there is a real and significant threat to a plethora of environmental regulations. This is why, working with Read and Anderson, Baroness Jones of Moulsecoomb is among those who have made significant interventions in favour of the maintenance of standards in the post-Brexit Trade Bill.

Clause 2 in the Lords Amendments would ensure the Bill maintains current levels of statutory protections in the areas of: human, animal or plant life or health; animal welfare; environmental protection; employment and labour.

These efforts should be greatly commended in the face of Brexit turmoil and the potential disaster its poor handling could mean for our people and planet. On issues of such importance, platitudes and aspirations from the Government cannot be allowed to replace legislation and we must continue to fight to retain hard won protections for future generations and our planet.

Make no mistake: a no-deal Brexit would mean we lose EU protections overnight, with a governance gap appearing immediately. As such, Government must fast track legislation to enshrine the protections afforded by the Precautionary Principle into our domestic statute book.

There had been some efforts made by Theresa May's administration to plan for these issues in the form of the proposed Environment Bill. It is here where we should now focus our efforts in holding the Johnson Government's feet to the fire, especially regarding the positive overtures made towards the Precautionary Principle within the draft Bill. We are hearing that the Bill will be brought back in mid-October and we hope this is the case.

The draft outline of the Bill stated it aims to: establish the Office for Environmental Protection (OEP) to uphold standards as we leave the EU, as well as "introduce a clear set of statutory environmental principles to guide policy making". The draft outline for the Bill also states that efforts will be made to ensure the "OEP is in place as soon as possible in a no deal scenario, with the necessary powers to review, and if necessary take enforcement action, in respect of breaches of environmental law from when the jurisdiction of the Court of Justice of the European Union has ended".

Subsequent elaboration of the plans indicated the setting up of a 16 strong secretariat of civil servants to form a temporary body. This group would deal with issues arising in the time between leaving the EU without a deal and the setting up of the OEP. However, scrutiny of the plans raised concerns around the small amount of staff on the interim body which would "leave a significant governance gap". And, while the then Minster for the Environment, Michael Gove, envisaged that local courts would also share some of the burden, these deficiencies in the scale of interventions planned – even within the draft Environment Bill which hasn't actually been passed – highlight the significant threat that no deal Brexit poses to our environment and principles; even in light of attempted contingency planning.

The imperative is now that the UK fast tracks the necessary protections and governance structures into place via the passing of legislation.

As things stand, we are at risk of taking a huge leap into the unknown. Exactly the kind of situation, ironically, that the Precautionary Principle is supposed collectively to protect us against...

7. The Lords standing up for environmental standards [2019]

Baroness Jenny Jones and Dr. Rupert Read reflect on the importance of the Precautionary Principle for future trade deals, in light of the (then) recent, historic defeat of the Government's trade bill by the House of Lords. This article appeared originally in *Medium*

Last week, the upper House inflicted a historic defeat on the Government's Trade Bill. This article explains the reasons for and the significance of the defeat, in the context of the struggle over Brexit and in defence of a precautionary approach to environmental- and public-health- protection.

In a time of rising anxiety with the possibility of a no deal Brexit looming, there must be assurances made in law that our future trading arrangements are not going to expose us to gross potential damage to our ecology. This is one of the key reasons why the House of Lords last week inflicted a remarkable defeat upon the Government's Trade Bill. This short article focuses upon this event, draws upon the contribution to the debate especially by the Green Party (in the person of the one Green peer, Baroness Jenny Jones) and reflects on on where go from here…

With up to 80% of the UK's environmental legislation deriving from EU law there is a need for continuity agreements within any trade bill to ensure that necessary environmental considerations are not written out. While the European Court of Justice and the European Commission have far from solved our environmental problems, there is concern that any trade agreement should incorporate much more than accord on tariffs. We must also ensure that we don't let slip our high standards on labour safety, environmental and consumer protection, and sustainable development.

The grounds for concern are made clear when one looks to the multilateral environmental agreements now under discussion with Australia. Baroness Jones raised attention to the potential for this deal to compromise our climate standards and further endanger biodiversity, as crucial ethical standards in relation to agriculture, food safety, and biodiversity have yet to be raised in the discussions.

Given the climate crisis and the broader ecological crisis, the need for a precautionary frame to all this has never been more pressing.Baroness Jones noted this during the debate, stating that trade deals are no longer a matter of 'reducing tariff barriers between nations and ensuring physical access to each other's ports'. Modern trade deals must include precautionary stipulations and these protective mechanisms must be enshrined in law.The worry is that these are being traded away in favour of political leverage as concessions are thought to attract trading partners who may refuse to buy into current standards; sadly the UK, as it potentially exits the EU, is all-too-desperate to attract such partners. Jones noted that we are just two months from Brexit and we have yet to receive any

reassurances from the government that new trade deals will not simply bow to corporate interests and make unacceptable environmental concessions.

There has already been pressure exerted by the threat of a mass business exodus in the event of a no deal Brexit. In the face of such a threat, it is particularly easy to see how cynical reassurances could be made by a UK government in a chastened position. Some countries will want to revise the terms of current deals with the worry being that environmental restrictions will be lifted. Without environmental protections becoming a matter of law, our commitments will be circumvented by corporate interests pursuing profit. While foreign partners strengthen their hand, the implication of this will be the weakening of *our* standards.

We cannot trade the precautionary principle for a mere profit principle. Precaution is essential, when the potential downside of its absence is ecocidal. There is nothing, no amount of profit or new business, that can compensate for potential serious and irreversible ecological losses.

Furthermore, the precautionary principle demands that we think holistically about all this. If we lower food standards, public health will decline, putting our NHS under further strain. If we lower standards on emissions, the same thing will happen; the current air pollution crisis is partly a result of a widespread pro-car and weak-standards regime.

When it comes to public health, animal welfare and the precautionary principle, the chlorinated chicken is the symbolic image of our day and there is great distaste for it — and fortunately current legislation to guard against it. But it is concerning that the United States' Defect Levels Handbook still makes provisions for '30 insect fragments in a 100 gram jar of peanut butter and 3 milligrams of rat droppings per pound of ginger'.

If we lose the precautionary principle, if we trade it for example in return for some bargain basement deal with Trump's America, then you can bet your bottom dollar that chlorinated chicken not to mention insect fragments and rat droppings will be heading straight towards our mouths.

So what is being done? Michael Gove has announced a new 25 Year Environmental Plan with the introduction of the Office for Environmental Protection (OEP). But there is some reason to be sceptical about this… While the ECJ took the UK to court for failing to comply with pollution targets, as of yet, it is difficult to see how the OEP, which has weak proposed powers of enforcement, can really deliver in the same way as the ECJ and the European Commission. If this new watchdog does not have the legal teeth to levy fines on public bodies that fail to comply with environmental targets, it will be a watchpup, more than a watchdog. There need to be legally binding targets to enforce public bodies to comply. As such, it is important to reiterate Lord Purvis's closing remarks in last week's debate, that 'it is only when commitments given at a political level are enshrined in law that we can be reassured'.

Gove's plan (that touches on some of the concerns that the Trade Bill debate covered) is under discussion in a key Select Committee in the House of Commons *tomorrow*, Jan. 30th. Let us hope that Parliamentarians carefully heed the strong message that the Lords have sent, in inflicting a rare defeat

like last week's upon a Government, and that they can work together to ensure that 'free trade' doesn't scupper our current valuable protections.

8. What is actually wrong with WTO rules?: Why they are significantly worse than the EU [2019]

Adam Woods and Rupert Read outline the complexities of international trade amidst the option for a No-Deal Brexit and the implications of the UK's reverting to WTO trading rules. This article appeared originally in *Medium*.

We have written this article not out of any love for the EU but because we feel duty-bound to explain to a still largely-unsuspecting public what 'No-Deal' would really mean, just how disastrous it would be — and what might still be done to stop it.

For the first time in 40 years, the UK has to re-consider its trading policy. At the moment, there is plenty of talk about "falling back" onto World Trading Organisation (WTO) rules in the event of a no-deal Brexit, an outcome which Theresa May's giant game of 'chicken' makes dangerously likely. And indeed, if this is what happens, the UK will find itself solely under the minimalist rules-based trading system of the WTO. As this remains the legal default position, in the event of a no-deal Brexit we will find ourselves in a position in which tariff-free trade between the UK and the EU ceases and the agreements held in place over the last four decades to boost revenue on imported goods and protect specific sectors of the economy will be rendered null and void. New tariffs will mostly be paid by the importer, but ultimately it will be the consumer/citizen who pays the price.

Perhaps this is what is currently motivating the political chatter surrounding Article 24 — a topic shrouded by misinformation. Conservative Ben Bradley has recently suggested that "Article 24 of the World Trade Organisation treaty allows us to continue to trade with Europe on zero tariffs while we negotiate a free trade arrangement." One of the motivating factors behind Bradley's misplaced enthusiasm is the thought that we will be able to exercise our sovereignty fully under a no-deal scenario, without the encumbrances of the EU.

This is incorrect and rests upon a misunderstanding of what sovereignty is — the same misunderstanding of sovereignty that is implicit in contemporary political discourse that we can cut and run and from there exercise our will in any way we see fit. For one, we currently have veto powers over certain major decisions, as a member of the European Union, and so if there is a proposal to, say, allow Turkey to join or form a European army, our 73 democratically elected European representatives or, more simply and definitively, our Westminster Government (represented on the EU Council) could unilaterally refuse and that would be the end of the matter.

At the moment, as a member of the EU, the Government procurement agreement (GPA) allows British companies to bid for a part in American contracts. That market alone is worth 1.7 trillion dollars and allows our companies to stake claims for involvement in massive infrastructural projects. Upon defaulting to WTO terms, our re-entry to the GPA has to be ratified by all other members. Currently, Moldova has used its veto to refuse our re-entry.

Connectedly, arguably, what makes genuine political choice possible in a global economy is the pooling of sovereignty amongst member states of a customs union.. (For a good discussion of this, see Will Hutton and Andrew Adonis, *Saving Britain: How We Must Change To Prosper In Europe*, pp.103-123). And even if what Bradley says were true there would be little cause for celebration as the article makes no provisions for environmental protection and the WTO itself is toothless when it comes to the enforcement of its own non-tariff measures (NTMs).

Accordingly, there is no reasonable case to be made for a withdrawal from the customs union on the basis of the claim that our 'sovereignty' will now be assured. And what is clear is the choices we will be left with upon withdrawal are: (1) sign up for whatever global markets demand, or (2) systematically withdraw from global markets and grow insular and poor. (Unless possibly we are able to take up a 3rd possibility set out in a previous publication by one of us: the possibility of Britain becoming genuinely more self-sufficient, and 'prosperous' not in terms of GDP but in a greener way). Going on the evidence of the last two years, and more especially of the last couple of months, a no-deal Brexit is looking more and more likely. So it is important to get clearer upon where we would then stand in the global markets:

The default tariffs would apply at the highest set rate. For instance, 9.8% tariff on cars or car parts that other countries are going to have to pay if they buy from British manufacturers. Currently, we have a 0% tariff on car parts exported to members of the EU. It is going to cost our trading partners much more to trade with us in future. The outcome of this is clear to see: our current customers will buy different cars from suppliers within the customs union. Entire industries will be subject to extra layers of taxation. This will destroy British industries. We're effectively in the position of putting trade sanctions upon ourselves and calling it an act of sovereignty.

The upshot of this is that it will leave us in a situation when selling our exports of saying, "we want to sell you these products, but how about this: we charge you 9.8% more than you're currently paying?"

There is no way that this makes any sense or is viable for us, unless possibly, again, we actually want to get serious about being a far more self-reliant nation. But that can't be done overnight! And there are now barely 40 days and nights before we are supposed to leave the EU…

Under WTO rules we will be faced with scenario with two important factors. There will be liberalised trading stipulations; and there will be no legal bite when it comes to enforcing its standards. For now, this is working in our favour. As Lord Adonis has recently noted, 'by refusing to import chlorinated chicken, genetically modified organisms, and beef stuffed with hormones from the US, we are in breach of WTO rules' health standards'.

With the EU, we have trade deals spanning 168 non-EU countries and if we exit we will have renegotiate 'at least 759 treaties'. Currently, the only two deals Liam Fox has managed to get are with Switzerland and the Faroe Islands (fine if you like chocolate and cuckoo clocks; we honestly don't know what we will be trading with the Faroes but one can be confident that it will be virtually nothing, as their population is under 50,000). Japan (population 127 million) has just signed a huge trade deal with EU, and Fox's answer to this is a copy and paste job.

It is not without cause that Andrew Adonis has labelled this the "wrecked trade option".

As it currently stands, we will quite possibly simply not be able to continue trading. There is a cargo ship currently on the way to South America and due to arrive after the 29th of March. It is uncertain whether the goods will be impounded or whether they will be able to leave the ship, and there is further uncertainty about the paper work required after the 29th. Another cargo ship is due to leave to India this week. You could say that these two ships are in the same boat.

Meanwhile: In a move that simultaneously condemns his own moral standing and provides support to exactly the system he wants to avoid, Sir Jim Ratcliffe has reportedly planned a move to Monaco to avoid £4 billion in Green tax. These should be indicators that Brexit is being led by the super-rich seeking further exemption from the taxes that they reluctantly pay — in this particular instance, on vital climate policy measures. If we have any hope of reducing our emissions, cynical moves such as this should be met with stern approbation.

Of most importance in this regard is the weak standards of the WTO when it comes to enforcing its NTMs, which include baggy stipulations for environmental protection, stipulations of such generality that they are dangerously open for interpretation. And the mandate and powers of the WTO are far more modest and narrow than the hard-line Brexiteers in the European Research Group make out. Beyond the rates at which tariffs are set, it tries to ensure they are non-discriminatory so countries apply the same tariffs to all importers. But crucially, unlike the EU, the WTO has, as we have already flagged, in effect no powers of enforcement meaning it is only as the willingness of its members to abide by the limited scope of trade it oversees.

This would therefore imply a reckless disregard of the precautionary principle as the WTO itself, unlike the EU, has no specific agreement dealing with the environment. This is why "falling back" onto WTO rules is a misnomer: it suggests that there is something like a viable safety-net in place. What this scenario actually presents us with is a case of backsliding on our environmental commitments at a time when we are in desperate need of stronger, not weaker measures.

The need for stronger environmental assurances enshrined in law has been the source of a recent debate in the upper House which led to a historic defeat on the Government's Trade Bill in part by Baroness Jones of the Green Party.

Some useful amendments to that bill to put flesh on its skeleton and get it passed before we're left at the mercy of Trump and Xi et al would include some of the following:

 The phasing out the routine use of antibiotics in farming and a regulation compatible with the principle of non-regression in UK food safety and public health standards.This would ensure that chlorinated chickens and other frankenfoods would never reach our plates.

 A law compatible with the principle of non-regression in UK environmental protection. This would be in line with the precautionary principle to guard against the possibility of backsliding on our environmental commitments — notably our commitment in the Paris agreement to limit global temperature to 1.5C.

 It should be an objective of UK representatives in meetings of the World Trade Organisation to ensure that the World Trade Organisation modifies its procedures in a way which secures the supremacy of international treaties arrived at under the auspices of the United Nations over trade agreements not arrived at under the auspices of the United Nations.

However, and perhaps this will help shed further light on the reality of crashing out on WTO terms, the UK cannot require the WTO to modify its procedures in a way that secures the supremacy of international treaties that were arrived at under the auspices of the UN over trade agreements that were not. The WTO and the UN are two distinct independent organisations, with two distinct bodies of international law. The WTO is not part of the UN system and exists independently in international law. That position is combined with the fact that there is an established principle of international law that there is no hierarchy of sources of international law. Reform of the WTO therefore requires reform of the WTO's own treaties, which has nothing to do with UN law, nor can it. Trade agreements, too, whether they seek to reform the WTO, or are secured bilaterally, must comply with the relevant law, which is WTO law. They exist outside UN law.

Importantly, this issue is not solely a matter of securing "free trade" — a desperately difficult thing to negotiate in itself and usually imposed by the strong on the weak — and should not solely be framed in this way. It is now a matter of protecting our planet's very future — something almost entirely omitted from every discussion of this topic in the media. Given the situation we're in and the pleas from an extreme pro-Brexit clique to sever all ties, no matter the cost, there is a high possibility that we will be left without the strong measures needed to stop our carbon budget careening. Whereas: Our situation is one that actually calls for extreme precaution and legal measures to shore up our environmental commitments.

Instead of crashing out with no deal, or accepting May's deeply flawed deal, some would humbly suggest that we currently have the best deal it is possible to have with the largest single market on the planet. As well as that, as a member of the EU we have 34 different trade agreements with other countries and trade-blocks. So, we have another 60 countries we can export to — including the USA — freely and much more easily.

Under the WTO, everything we export around the world will have the highest tariff it is possible to apply. 5.4 million small to medium enterprises in the UK who will have to figure out how to ship their now less than attractive product to others. On top of that, we will be a single country against 163 others wielding less influence than we currently do as the third largest member of the EU28. We are

currently represented in this capacity. Outside of the EU, we will become a 'third country' with no trade deals, applying a pre-agreed set of tariffs that we have at this moment in time had no say on.

Does this sound like taking back control?

We now have a far clearer picture of what we are letting ourselves in for. And with a Government reduced to a mad balancing act between factionalism and self-preservation, and Labour now at open war with itself, it is looking likely that, unless something radical is initiated, and fast, we are going to deadlock until we default.

It is surely therefore clear that there needs to be a delay and that this issue needs to go back to the people for a vote on the final terms / and on whether to leave at all, given we now know what they are. The politicians in the main two parties have shown themselves incapable. The least they can do is hand over back to the people to sort this mess out.

9. Will ecology be the first casualty of Brexit? [2019]

Victor Anderson and Rupert Read discuss the measures and principles which must be included in the Government's promised Environment Bill, including preventing pollution, curbing GHG emissions, and Green taxation. This article first appeared in *The Ecologist*.

Most of the laws which protect our environment come from Europe. In order to plug some of the gaps which Brexit will create - if it happens - the government has promised to bring in a new Environment Bill.

Although that is not yet ready, the Conservatives feel under pressure to be seen to be doing something, and so the government recently published a Draft Environment Bill. The draft and responses to it will provide the basis for the bill itself, although the timing for that is unclear.

Draft bills don't have to go through the whole parliamentary process that real bills have, which normally entails scope for amendments in both the Commons and the Lords.

Principles

In this case, instead, the 'pre-legislative scrutiny' consists of a joint inquiry by two committees of MPs: the Environmental Audit Committee and the Environment Select Committee.

There are many aspects of the Draft Bill which worry environmentalists and others. For instance, and very importantly: the Draft proposes setting up a new Office for Environmental Protection, but there

are concerns about its independence from government and the adequacy of its resources and powers to enforce the laws.

However in this short article we will come from a different angle: the unsatisfactory way in which the government is proposing to deal with the “environmental principles” it lists, principles inherited from EU law.

The principles themselves are generally agreed to be sound: for example polluters should pay for the pollution they create, action should be taken to prevent environmental damage, and we should be cautious when we don’t have all the evidence relevant to making a decision (“the precautionary principle”).

What is worrying about the Draft Bill is principally the limits it imposes on the application of these principles, which are its own principles, set out in Clause 2 on the first page of the Bill.

Green taxation

The principles are to be “proportionately applied”. What this would probably mean in practice is that they won’t be applied at all if they cost the Treasury or business money.

The principles are also to be something for government to “have regard to”: another get-out clause which implies actually applying the principles only when there is nothing else government wants to do which conflicts with them, such as building new motorways and runways.

The principles — especially the preventative principle and the precautionary principle, which keep us safe — need instead to be duties, unavoidable, sacrosanct.

Similarly concerning is the exclusion of “taxation, spending or the allocation of resources within government” from the scope of the principles.

This is effectively the Treasury opting out of having the principles applying to anything it does, and appears to ignore the ongoing debate about “green taxation”, and even apparently rules out any idea of how environmental considerations might impact on the allocation of public expenditure for example, for flood defences.

Policy

Even stranger than what is in the bill itself is one comment in the official "explanatory notes".

Paragraph 52 states that “it may be inappropriate to consider the environmental principles in an area of policy that changes or is novel”.

It is obviously *precisely* in such cases that a consideration of environmental principles, and especially the precautionary principle, is required.

However, perhaps the worst limitation of all comes later in the Draft Bill. We find that the new Office for Environmental Protection (OEP) is going to be responsible for applying the environmental principles only to “environmental law”, which is a far more limited category.

This, it would seem, exclude the full range of government policy – the planning system for example, or transport, or economic policy, energy, infrastructure, agriculture.

It is also worth noting that, crucially, emissions of greenhouse gases are explicitly excluded from the remit of the OEP, a strange limitation in view of the enormous impact of anthropogenic dangerous climate change across the environment.

This is only a Draft Bill. There is plenty of time and opportunity to improve on it, and several of the environment NGOs are hard at work trying to do that. But if they don’t succeed, the environment really will join the list of the casualties of Brexit.

10. After Brexit and Trump: don't demonise; localise! [2016]

Helena Norberg-Hodge and Rupert Read discuss the myriad, deep-seated and existential problems of globalisation, and call for a relocalisation of socio-economic life for the benefit of both people and planet. This article first appeared in *Resilience*.

The election of Donald Trump was a rude awakening from which many people in the US have still not recovered.

Their shock is similar to that felt by UK progressives, Greens, and those on the Left following the Brexit referendum.

In both cases, the visceral reaction was heightened by the barely-disguised racist and xenophobic messaging underpinning these campaigns.

Before these sentiments grow even more extreme, it’s vital that we understand their root cause. If we simply react in horror and outrage, if we only protest and denounce, then we fail to grasp the deeper ramifications of their votes.

For the defeat of both the Clinton campaign in the US and the Remain campaign in the UK can be explained by their inability to address the pain endured by ordinary citizens in the era of globalisation.

By failing to focus on the reckless profiteers driving the global economy, they allowed their opponents to offer a less truthful and more hateful explanation for voters’ social and economic distress.

In order to move forward, we need to give those who voted for Trump and Brexit something better to believe in. And we can. Because in both countries, voters emphatically rejected the system that has inflicted so much social and economic insecurity: pro-corporate globalisation. And that is the silver lining to the dark storm clouds we see.

Late lessons from early warnings

Before the Brexit vote, we warned that the gigantist, pro-growth rhetoric of most of the Remain side was utterly alienating to many small-c conservatives and to people who have been harmed by the uncontrolled movement of capital, goods, services and workers.

And we pointed out that neither side was painting a big picture that corresponded to the brutal reality of successive trade treaties, including those within the EU itself, that have put ordinary people in permanent competition with each other. It was against that system – and against the elites that alone have benefitted from it – that many millions in Britain voted, in some desperation and anger, to Leave.

Much the same applies to the US election. While many voters saw Hillary Clinton as capable, they did not see her as an alternative to the neoliberal status quo. Bernie Sanders would probably have beaten Trump, precisely because he firmly and explicitly rejected the pro-free-trade, pro-corporate 'consensus'.

We need to learn from the Brexit and Trump votes that the far-Right thrives because it has a populist answer to the vicious impacts of globalisation. Voters want fundamental change, and the 'reforms' sought by mainstream progressives, Greens and those on the Left – like job training programs for displaced workers or voluntary safety standards for Third World factories – are simply inadequate.

Instead, we need to offer an alternative to globalisation itself.

How globalisation drives racial tension

Globalisation and market-driven centralisation actually *drive* the increase in xenophobia and racism that we have seen, by forcing people from every part of the world to compete against each other in a vicious economic race that only a handful can win.

One of the authors (Helena Norberg-Hodge) was a first-hand witness to this process in Ladakh, a region of India in the western Himalayas known as 'Little Tibet'. For more than 600 years, Ladakhi Buddhists and Muslims lived side by side with no recorded instance of group conflict. They helped one another at harvest time, attended one another's religious festivals, and sometimes intermarried.

But over a period of about 15 years starting in 1975, when the region was first opened to the global economy, tensions between Buddhists and Muslims escalated rapidly: by 1989 they were bombing each other's homes. One mild-mannered Buddhist grandmother, who a decade earlier had been drinking tea and laughing with her Muslim neighbor, told me, *"We have to kill all the Muslims or they will finish us off."*

How did relations between these two ethnic groups change so quickly and completely? The transformation is unfathomable, unless one understands the complex interrelated effects of globalisation on individuals and communities worldwide. These included

- the undermining of Ladakh's local economy through the import of 'cheap' but heavily subsidized products;
- the centripetal pull of urban areas where jobs and political power became centralised;
- the consequent breakdown of village-scale cultural and governance structures;
- and the creation of unemployment and real poverty (problems that were preciously unknown in Ladakh).

In combination, these factors led to rising hostility against 'the other'. (Norberg-Hodge has described these connections more fully in her book *Ancient Futures*, and in the documentary film *The Economics of Happiness*.)

Ladakh's experience is not unique: all over the Global South, cultures have been impacted in a similar manner beginning with the era of conquest and colonialism; so have the UK and Europe starting with the Enclosures. But in recent decades, during the modern era of globalisation, the process has accelerated dramatically.

Destroying jobs, reducing wages, undermining conditions of work

By allowing corporations to move unfettered around the globe, 'free trade' treaties put workers throughout the industrialised world in competition with those who will accept a fraction of a dollar per hour.

For example, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) resulted in a net loss of 680,000 American jobs, and the Permanent Normal Trade Relations deal with China led to a net loss of another 2.7 million jobs. And it's not only the disappearance of jobs that leads to impoverishment, but the *threat* that jobs can be easily taken elsewhere if workers don't accept lower wages or fewer benefits.

At the same time, the infiltration of big business throughout the global South – most often with the support of national governments and backed by international financial institutions – has eliminated many of the livelihoods that local economies in those countries once provided.

With locally-adapted ways of life systematically undermined by economic policies geared towards the big and the global, millions of desperate people in the South find themselves with just two options: to accept minimal wages and appalling working conditions in industrial metropolises, or to migrate.

It is estimated that, as a direct result of heavily subsidized corn flooding the Mexican market under NAFTA, 2.4 million small farmers were displaced, and subsequently funneled into crowded urban centers or across the border to the US. So the loss of jobs in the North and the migrant crisis in the

South are two sides of the same coin. But people have been steered away from looking at the flawed rules of the global economy that are behind both problems.

Although philosophically opposed to government regulation, the Right is now exploiting a situation – the cultural, economic, and psychological insecurity of vast swaths of the population – that is a product of the systematic deregulation of big business. Rather than allowing them to pull this sleight of hand, Left and Green voices must present a cogent critique of globalisation, and a coherent alternative.

We must show that it is not real progress to force every culture to commodify their commons, to subject every policy decision to the 'discipline' of monopolistic markets, to transform citizens into mindless consumers, and to lengthen supply-lines endlessly. The world has become dominated by a neoliberal ideology that makes all of this seem natural, desirable, unavoidable. It is none of those things.

In fact, voters are telling us that the age of David Cameron, Hillary Clinton and Francois Hollande is already over. The question now is: will it be succeeded by the age of Farage, Trump and le Pen. Or will we instead offer a viable green set of alternatives to globalization. If it is to be the latter, then our best option is *localisation*.

The solution: going local

Essentially, localisation means reducing the scale of economic activity – it's about bringing the economy home. That doesn't mean pulling up the drawbridges and retreating into isolationism. Nor does it mean an end to trade, even international trade.

But it does mean a fundamental change of emphasis: away from monoculture for export towards diversification for local needs. In a time of human-induced climate chaos and dwindling energy supplies, we need to reject out of hand the absurdities of the global marketplace, in which countries across the world routinely import and export identical products in almost identical quantities. The subsidies and other supports that currently make such practices 'efficient' and 'profitable' need to be reversed.

By reducing the scale of the economy, the environmental impacts of economic activity shrink as well. But the argument for localisation goes beyond the environment. Among other things, localisation allows us to live more ethically as citizens and consumers.

In the global economy, it's as though our arms have grown so long that we can no longer see what our hands are doing. By contrast, when the economy operates on a smaller scale, everything is necessarily more transparent. We can see if the apples we are buying from the neighbouring farm are being sprayed with pesticides; we can see if workers' rights are being abused.

We can already catch glimpses of localisation in action. Across the world, literally millions of initiatives are springing up-often in isolation one from another, but sharing the same underlying principles. The most important of these initiatives relate to food – which is important since food is the only thing humans produce that we all require every day.

From farmers' markets to community supported agriculture, from 'edible schoolyards' to permaculture, a local food movement is sweeping the planet. But there are also projects underway to localise business, energy sources, banking and finance, and other needs.

Seeing the big picture

The UK decision to leave the EU is a risk, in that it might lead this country to seek to race even faster to the bottom, in particular by abandoning hard-won environmental protections. But it is also a great opportunity. We could choose, now, to disentangle ourselves from a fragile, resource-intensive and utterly-destructive global economy, in favour of re-embedding ourselves back into the Earth and our localities.

Similarly, President Trump is likely to serve up an incoherent mélange of protectionism on the one hand and deregulatory, pro-corporate policies on the other. Localisation, by contrast, represents a coherent and comprehensive shift in direction – it protects not only our countries and workforces but also the Earth, future generations, and the poor.

Relocalising would radically reign in the invisible Right of corporate domination, and would reverse the rising tide of the more visible Far-Right. But this can only happen if we see the bigger picture. It isn't enough to defend immigrants against bad treatment if we fail to act against the *system* that drives the breakdown of community and of civility, that pulls people out of their own cultures and economies.

If we do *not* relocalise – if we continue to throw people into ruthless competition with each other while making local communities unviable – then we are watering the seeds of further anti-immigrant sentiment, and worse. But if we embrace localisation, then we sow new seeds of cooperation and international understanding.

Relocalising won't be easy. The forces that promote globalisation control most of the avenues of information to which people have access, and their propaganda saturates the media, including the Internet.

It is going to take a linking of hands internationally – among labour and environmental groups, small businesses and family farmers, educators and students, religious groups and peace activists – to put new political leaders in place who do not ratify treaties that devastate our present and our future.

Instead, they need to collaborate to create treaties that *protect* the local, everywhere. And it will take determined effort in localities everywhere to restore local food and energy systems, and to rebuild local knowledge and local democracy.

Perhaps you are already part of that determined effort. If you are not, we hope you decide to join us in this vital work.

11. Opinion: A Green Brexit is possible [2020]

Emma Dawnay and Rupert Read, citing the rightwing Brexit slogan 'Take Back Control,' argue for the *actual implementation* of exactly that: rather than striving for a 'Global Britain' which needlessly imports good from the world over, with the attendant carbon and ecological footprint – not to mention out-competition of British producers – the UK should use Brexit as an opportunity to strengthen local communities, restart local production of needful goods – COVID-19 having shown the ridiculousness of global supply chains – and perhaps most importantly, achieve national food sovereignty. This article first appeared in *Green World.*

The Cummings (aka Johnson) administration is probably deliberately seeking to drive the UK over a cliff into a 'no deal' Brexit. Wringing our hands about this is pointless. Since the general election, Brexit is actually happening. Our task now is to work towards it sooner or later being a good one, a green one.

This hard-Brexit, hard-right government is seeking to race to the bottom in making 'trade treaties' with far-flung nations around the world (most notably of course Trump's America) – tending to increase our ecological footprint (and cancel much-needed regulations that protect both our health and nature) at the very moment that that footprint desperately needs reducing.

Once this strategy has failed – and it likely won't take long before we see both dire ecological and economic effects from the Brexit-trade farrago we are about to enter into – then the way will be clear for a better version of Brexit, which could be a key election issue in 2024. Or indeed, maybe much sooner than that.

The key to a green Brexit is the principle, central to our report, that rather than seeking to race to the bottom in a rush to 'open Britain' by throwing out regulations and selling off our public services like the NHS, we need to make being outside the EU work by seeking to relocalise. Taking, finally, the principle of subsidiarity seriously: bringing about a bioregional economy, and ensuring we have the strategic industries that we need.

The Covid-19 pandemic has taught us plainly that our strategic industries are not those in which we have a comparative advantage (as wrongly expounded by neoclassical economic theory), but rather those that we need to supply us with essential goods in times of crises (which are likely to be most times, from now on).

Johnson has just said about a trade deal with Australia: "I want a world in which we send you Marmite and you send us Vegemite". We propose a Brexit in which British industries can supply our key workers with face masks, and our citizens with food (and toilet rolls), but not one in which Marmite and Vegemite pointlessly cross each other in travelling to the other side of the world.

Of course, we are not suggesting that we cut ourselves off from the world. As we have learnt from the coronavirus pandemic, we must help each other, internationally, especially in times of crisis. We must share scientific knowledge and engineering know-how, whether it be for vaccines or how to produce

renewable energy. And we must help each other out when disaster strikes, in particular with food and medical support.

But the way we could be outside the EU and this not be an eco-disaster is if we use the opportunity to rebuild local production for local needs – in particular if we seek to achieve the crucial goal of food sovereignty – whilst drastically reducing imports. This is the opposite to the Johnson/Cummings 'Global Britain' in which global trade is always encouraged despite the fact that imported goods often only out-compete home produce because the climate 'cost' of carbon for shipping and aviation is not accounted for and goods are made in counties with lower environmental standards and fewer worker protections.

Rebuilding local production is an action that will simultaneously make us less vulnerable to the ever-growing vicissitudes of the deteriorating global climate as global just-in-time supply chains become increasingly fragile.

This goal, of having a food system that is secure and within our own compass, will require us eating seasonally, eating lower on the food chain, drastically reducing food waste, and letting more people get back onto the land.

Then we'll actually realise the promise of the otherwise ludicrously-misleading slogan: 'Take back control'.

This is an agenda that makes clear and obvious eco-sense. It is a practicable way of pursuing the ideology our time so desperately needs, ecologism.

It is an agenda that can also appeal to the 'Left' by way of reducing our exploitation of the Global South and rebuilding our offshored industries (such as IT-manufacturing, medical supplies-production and even much recycling). And it can appeal to the 'Right' by way of actually being serious about 'taking back control', rather than allowing our country to be controlled by multinationals and unreliable foreign leaders.

To conclude, in the terrible situation we are in, of an imminent rubbish Brexit while public attention is still understandably preoccupied by the coronavirus crisis, it is no good Greens just sitting around being sad or expressing aimless anger; the situation makes action to secure our future against the threat of bad trade deals more urgent than ever. In other words, we have to switch attention to making Brexit work.

And this can be done. Johnson and Cummings won't do it. But if we start propagandising now for a green Brexit – a Brexit that radically relocalises, gives us food sovereignty, reverses the harmful effects of the offshoring of our industry, and thereby reduces the incredibly-damaging effects (on communities and climate alike) of the mad torrent of global trade – then, in the next few years, or certainly later this decade, perhaps as food crises by way of climate chaos hit harder, we can implement a way of being outside the EU that works. One that stops us unsustainably draining food

(and resources, and skilled labour, and ecological space) from the rest of the world. Another Brexit is possible.

12. Post-Brexit Environmental Principles – Government and Risky Business [2021]

Victor Anderson and Rupert Read decry the virtual abandonment of the precautionary principle in the Environmental Bill, presently being considered in the Lords, via a Statement of Environmental Principles by the Government, which will be legally-binding upon the Bill's passage. This article first appeared on *Medium*.

The UK Government recently carried out a consultation on its Statement of Environmental Principles. The Statement will have legal status through being referred to in the Environment Bill, still slowly making its way through Parliament and now in the House of Lords. This Bill is supposed to repair the damage done by Brexit pulling the UK out of the shared EU arrangements for environmental protection.

One might think that the issue of risk — and particularly the risk of "low probability, high impact" events would have shot up the Government's agenda as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Here is an event which few predicted and yet the possibility of such an event could have been prepared for, in a way which would have benefited millions of people over the past year or so.

The consultation document shows no signs of such thinking. Quite the opposite: its focus is firmly on what is "likely", rather than the risks which may be taken as a result of hoping — or simply assuming — that nothing unlikely will ever happen. Whether the problems this causes are due to conceptual confusion in Defra or the deliberate undermining of Defra's intentions by Other Government Departments (prime suspect here is the Treasury) is not clear from outside Whitehall, but the means through which risky behaviour is to be encouraged are very clear: the dubious concepts of "proportionality" and "innovation".

Consider "proportionality" first: it means not taking potential environmental impacts into account TOO much. Impacts exist, but let's be reasonable about these things. This general approach can be interpreted in many different ways, but what does the consultation document say? The wording on page 9 is:

"When considering the environmental impact of a policy, policy-makers also need to take a proportionate approach; the environmental effects that should be considered are those which are both a) likely to occur, and b) likely to have a substantial impact."

This obviously implies that if an effect is unlikely to occur, i.e. there is a less than 50% chance of it, then it does not need to be considered in policy-making. This doesn't do anything to prepare us for "low probability, high impact". But we still have the precautionary principle.

On page 18, under the heading 'The Precautionary Principle', things get worse. Here we are told that "The principle should not unnecessarily hinder innovation due to novelty, without plausible evidence of a risk of serious or irreversible harm." But the whole point of the precautionary principle is that it urges caution where there is currently a lack of scientific evidence. It does not require "evidence" of harm, and certainly not of "serious or irreversible harm". It requires caution up to the point where there is sufficient evidence to merit something being given the go-ahead. Again, the Government proposes to err on the side of risky behaviour.

Furthermore, far from it being the case that "innovation" necessarily stands opposed to precaution, the Late Lessons From Early Warnings studies showed clearly that frequently the Precautionary Principle is a spur to innovation. Companies not-infrequently seek not to innovate, but rather to continue with dangerous, established, profit-making strategies or practices; the Precautionary Principle disrupts that complacency, and can thus force innovation for the sake of greater safety.

Another area of concern in the consultation document is how it treats the ecological footprint of the UK ('Global Britain'). Page 9 says: "However, for the majority of domestic policy it would unlikely to be appropriate to consider the environmental impact overseas, unless there is strong rationale for doing so." But — and this will be obvious to readers here even if not to those who wrote that sentence — that in a large proportion of cases where there are significant environmental impacts, a large proportion of those impacts are overseas. The climate emergency is global in nature and UK policies tending towards increased greenhouse gas emissions inevitably have an effect overseas. The UK economy (as Defra research has shown) has a significant impact on biodiversity overseas, for example through the food the UK imports and the land and water necessary to produce it. An understanding that the UK economy — and with that, our energy, transport, food, and housing systems — have an impact overseas is basic to any appreciation of the UK's international obligations, for example under the UNFCCC and CBD treaties.

Other principles referred to in the document are — "polluter pays", "prevention", "rectification at source", and "integration" — are not in themselves objectionable, but the Environment Bill (and the consultation document confirms this) seeks to apply them only to a limited range of cases of government policy-making. There is an opt-out for the Treasury, with the exclusion of tax and spending issues. There is also repeated reference to "environmental" law in ways that make it look as though the principles' writ won't run as far as planning law. The new Planning Bill expected soon may clarify this, and it will be important to get something like these principles incorporated into that controversial piece of legislation.

The document also represents a missed opportunity to add to the list of principles the principle of taking into consideration the interests of members of future generations, an approach pioneered by the Future Generations Act in Wales.

All this matters because this is no ordinary document. This is the Government's proposed way of interpreting the environmental principles it will be putting into law through the Environment Bill, and which we are depending on as our line of defence for the environment now the UK is outside the EU.

Part Three: Neither 'Left' nor 'Right;' Green Political Writings

13. Yes or No, We Need Democratic and Constitutional Reform [2014]

Written at the time of the Scottish Referendum, Rebecca Johnson and Rupert Read make the case for constitutional reforms, aimed at reinvigoration genuine democracy in the UK, which are even more badly needed now than they were 7 years ago. This article appeared originally in *The Ecologist*.

Only recently, waking up to the possibility of a Yes majority, have UK politicians begun thinking about the implications of Scottish independence for 'residual UK' - rUK for short.

Amid speculation about what to do about Westminster MPs representing Scottish seats (who are predominantly Labour), little thought is being given to the great opportunities (and challenges) for the future of British democracy in rUK.

Once the Scottish decision is known, we should push for negotiations on what domestic, national and international roles and institutions UK/rUK needs to put in place for a renewed and sustainable democratic future.

If Scotland votes Yes

As Scotland has done through the referendum debates, we must initiate discussions about what kind of Britain we want for the future. This in itself represents an exciting and unprecedented opportunity for civic engagement and reflection.

Negotiations should aspire - at a minimum - to grant citizens:

- a written constitution, with a form of proportional representation for Westminster parliamentary seats
- the right of recall of MPs by constituents;
- a directly elected Second Chamber to replace the anomalous House of Lords;
- the option for regions to take up greater regional representation and autonomy through directly-elected assemblies modelled roughly on the Welsh Assembly, probably based roughly on the constituencies used for European Parliament elections;
- and a citizens' bill of rights.

Meanwhile, the Welsh should be offered the option of turning their Assembly into a Welsh Parliament.

But such a package, with its list of key democratic reforms, is a bare minimum. Citizens need to be empowered further, in a way that has never yet happened in a Britain of subjects rather than citizens.

Examples of how that might happen include:

- Enhanced powers for local government (including, to rein in harmful business activity);
- proportional representation for local government elections;
- experimentation with more participatory democracy (such as participatory budgeting);
- and a serious effort to represent and adequately protect unborn future generations.

The negotiation process should involve a range of stakeholders as well as MPs and constitutional lawyers. And it should focus on an inclusive and deliberative Constitutional Convention.

The Constitution should then either be offered to the British public to be adopted by referendum, or should be adopted by the Parliament elected in May 2015 - with an understanding at the time of the election that those being elected were being elected with this as a key, defining task.

The next step would be to adopt an appropriate form of proportional representation to provide fairer and better political and regional representation in Westminster - and in any and all regional or national assemblies and parliaments.

The 2015 Parliament would then be dissolved and new elections held under the new electoral system.

If Scotland votes No?

After insisting on a binary yes-or-no choice, refusing to allow a 'Devo-max' option, the UK Conservative-LibDem government together with Labour are now scrambling to give Scottish voters an incentive to vote No by offering some form of 'Devo-max' under a reformed UK arrangement.

What precisely would still be on offer if the No vote wins is debatable, though it seems increasingly likely that Wesminster will be held to these promises of 'Devo-max', in the event of a No vote, especially a narrow one on a high turnout.

Progressives like the Greens - the only British political party that backs independence both north and south of the border - and Compass (see here and here) need to address Scottish discontent with the status quo - and its causes.

They must also recognise that serious democratic deficits exist elsewhere: in Wales, most if not all English regions, and Northern Ireland. Not to mention local government everywhere.

The 'West Lothian question'

So there is again a strong case for a Constitutional Convention. The Welsh are pressing this case, and rightly so. Interestingly, it is now being taken up in Scotland too.

Our strong belief is that such a Convention should be deliberative, and not only composed of elites. It should take as a rough model the impressive and inclusive deliberative process that took place in Iceland after the financial crash there.

One key reason why a Constitutional Convention is essential in the event of a No vote is the 'West Lothian question': If a Scottish Parliament decides Scotland's policies on a host of issues, how come Scottish MPs can vote on the same issues in the UK Parliament, determining policies in England, Wales or Northern Ireland?

With Devo-Max in Scotland, this question becomes completely unavoidable. The question should be settled - in a manner that involves the public, and is not merely imposed upon them.

Thus the undeniable need for a deliberative, inclusive, non-elite Constitutional Convention.

Yes or no, we need these reforms

Thus the upshot is that, whether the vote this week is Yes or No, the UK or rUK ought to have a Constitutional Convention. And that Constitutional Convention ought to be citizen-based and citizen-led rather than elite-based.

This is an exciting conclusion, and an inspiring prospect - a unique opportunity to address Britain's wider crisis of political and democratic legitimacy.

14. Death to 'austerity'. Long live sustainable abundance! [2015]

Sandy Irvine and Rupert Read stake out a third position via-a-vis austerity: while the Tories propose cuts, and Labour basically the inverse, the G/green alternative must be 'austerity' where it is truly needed – in the decadence of the modern Western lifestyle, where endless growth and consumption is so baked-into socio-economic assumptions it is not even spoken of, let alone questioned. While calling for 'cuts' in needless government and corporate waste, in view of regaining sight of the ecological limits of the earth, the Irvine and Read also demand the 'full funding' of what really matters to people – 'such as having secure access to high quality food that one has had a role in providing, such as trust, community, love, nature and unpolluted environment' – in the vein of the Voluntary Simplicity movement (see Section 18). This article appeared originally in *The Ecologist*.

The 'austerity' issue is very much in the news. In last weekend's *Observer*, for example, it popped up in several articles.

On the front page a number of economists are quoted as supporting Jeremy Corbyn's *"anti-austerity politics"*.

Inside there is an opinion piece by economics correspondent William Keegan who credits Corbyn for foregrounding the issue and challenging orthodox arguments for government spending cutbacks.

On another page, a *"young Labour supporter"* explains why she supports Corbyn because of his stance on *"Tory austerity"*.

Elsewhere in the paper, a feature reports on the growing unpopularity of the President of Brazil, the Workers' Party's Dilma Rouseff, partly due to her acceptance of 'austerity' policies.

There was also a big item about the former Greek finance minister Yanis Varoufakis who broke with Prime Minister, Alexis Tsipras, over the EU austerity package. In the same manner as Corbyn's attacks on Tory policies, the new breakaway party from Syriza condemns the measures as not just unnecessary but also totally counter-productive.

Perhaps genuine issues are getting clouded in all the Tory- and EU-bashing ... Not that such bashing is undeserved! On the contrary! But we have to carefully home in on *what* exactly it is that deserves such bashing. For, in reality, there are two possible meanings for 'austerity'.

The wrong kind of austerity ... and the right

'Austerity 1': Current government programmes around the world with George Osborne very much at the forefront. Here, 'austerity' basically means: often-cruel cuts targeted at the vulnerable, in pursuit of a pro-corporate variety of neoliberalism that is fixated on (reducing) government deficits.

'Austerity 2': For reasons we'll come to, this is probably better called 'Green scissors'. [i] These are the desperately needed targeted cutbacks in significant segments of both public and private spending as well as (and this, literally, is the bottom-line) in total levels of consumption: to create 'one-planet' economies, the only sustainable option.

At present, we are living as if we have about four planets. Three more than we actually have. Current policies for more physical growth can be but a recipe for ruin.

Let's start by examining 'Austerity 1'. Austerity in the first sense could be argued to be quite a bit of a misnomer, for reasons we will explain.

It is certainly true that part of the population has been hit hard and sometimes very cruelly so by cutbacks in certain areas of government spending. In that sense, government policies are indeed an 'austerity programme'. And we condemn such policies resolutely: it is in this sense that the Green challenge to austerity is second to none. [ii]

We're alright, Jack

Yet many people remain comfortably off, some cushioned by private or public sector pensions that are generous, and/or the sale of an inherited parental property, and/or high salaries, bonuses, rents & dividends.

So sales at comparatively upmarket stores such as Waitrose reflect the spending power still possessed by this layer. Similarly, car-sales in 2014 were at their highest level for a decade. This summer has seen a boom in long-haul flights forward bookings. The size of this layer of the populace may partly explain why 'anti-austerity' politics cut less ice at the last General Election than many had expected. [iii]

Many millions of people voted for parties that advocated deficit cuts and fiscal 'discipline'. To some extent, propaganda (falsely) comparing government finances with those of individual households has worked. But, basically, a lot of these people - more than enough to elect a government - still feel quite comfortable.

There is a growing number of what Guy Standing calls the 'precariat' in this country, but tens of millions in this country who feel anything but precarious in their well-off-ness. The cuts do not necessarily come as a severe and direct blow, certainly not to all.

For example, Morpeth, in mid-Northumberland, has long been very heavily dependent on jobs in the public sector. One might assume that it would be badly shaken by all the cuts. And indeed some particular individuals and communities have been.

However, the impact seems to have been softened by the fact that many 'victims' were close to retirement age anyway, had paid off their mortgages and had reasonable employment pensions to live on. These are also people who are, perhaps, more likely to vote (and to be on the electoral register in the first place) than many of the younger and/or poorer people much more harshly hit by cutbacks in benefits, by tuition fees, bedroom taxes and so forth.

A much smaller group has seen its income and general wealth shoot way up under 'austerity'. [iv] Overall there has been penalisation of some but rewards for others. It is a redistribution, Robin-Hood-in-reverse programme, not austerity for all. This is why it is a sickening lie of Osborne et al to pretend that we are all in it together. And why to speak in blank terms of 'austerity' even in sense 1 is highly misleading: austerity for the allegedly 'undeserving' only has been the rule.

Rolling back the state ... in parts

Similarly the state has been 'rolled back' in some areas but strengthened in others, with much more centralisation, as in education. The state is highly pro-active in many fields, not least thanks to measures such as the Growth and Infrastructure Act (2013).

The government was of course highly interventionist to prop up the financial sector, shelling out some £141bn on bank bailouts, as at March 2013. [v] Another wing of the state, the Office of National

Statistics, puts the cost much higher at £1021 bn (£1.021 trillion) as *"temporary effects of financial interventions"* in the UK banking sector.

Total government spending has not been falling significantly. It is particularly inaccurate to say it is returning to 30s levels. [vi] What is really happening is the cutting of direct public provision (libraries, care homes, etc) and its transfer to other hands, sometimes to not-for-profit companies but at other times to pure 'sharks' (see James Meek's excellent and disturbing book, 'Private Island').

In other words, 'Austerity 1' is not so much the dismantling of the state and overall slashing of its spending as its restructuring and the redirection of its expenditures.

Some government departments are indeed being pruned severely but others are protected. Government may be cutting direct provision (eg social housing) but it pays monies indirectly by way of assorted raised thresholds, credits, allowances and benefits (eg housing benefit which really benefits landlords rather than their tenants).

It is paying out much bigger sums on vast infrastructure projects, typified by gross boondoggles such as Hinckley Point nuclear power station and the HS2 'rocket-on-wheels' scheme (the 'anti-austerity' Jeremy Corbyn is firmly against the former but seems to be hedging his bets on the latter). [vii]

Loadsamoney - for some

There is no shortage of money for bread-and-circuses, e.g. the Olympics and other spectacles. Indeed, the London Olympics could be seen as state-led gentrification, with both poorer local residents and local biodiversity paying the direct price. [viii]

Not surprisingly then, total state spending was over £735bn in 2014 and will hit £780bn by 2020. Debt interest payments are higher than spending on education, for example. George Osborne borrowed more in 4 years than Labour did in 13. [ix] Debt has been used as a 'growth' strategy, as in the Help-to-Buy housing bubble. No austerity for landlords and estate agents! [x]

Basically, the government itself is doing 'Austerity 1' on only half its budget. It is investing in harmful new transport infrastructure (roads, carbon-intensive high-speed rail and, soon, air), giving tax breaks to highly-harmful fossil fuels (e.g. fracking), and so forth. Shifting investment (as the Government is doing) from people to such capital investment makes it HARDER to achieve one-planet-living. [xi]

Increasing our spending on infrastructure within a shrinking carbon budget will tend to increase inequality. This is so especially because only the rich will be able to afford to use that invested carbon - over and above basic needs. This is a growing problem and a problem of increasing urgency, because it also reduces capacity for climate adaptation (for all).

A couple of examples of what we mean here: road-building is well-funded - but there are cuts in the number of bus drivers. And investment in incineration (heavily subsidised by government) is actively curtailing recycling rates. [xii]

So, as we've now made clear: 'Austerity 1' is only really austerity for *some*. Meanwhile there is no 'austerity' at all in terms of the pressures being put on the real economy, the Earth's ecology: quite the reverse. As we've said, the Government and the 'Opposition' alike in Britain favour huge road-building programmes, a new runway for one London airport or another, subsidies for the fossil fuel industry, and on and on and on, through one eco-destructive project after another.

Similarly in Brazil, President Dilma Rouseff has been pushing certain forms of government retrenchment. But there are no cutbacks in the war on the rest of nature. She has relaxed (already not very strong) controls on logging in Amazonia, opened doors for more dam building and encouraged more fossil fuel exploitation.

The kindest cuts we desperately need

'Austerity' as practiced in the sense of Austerity 1 is really all about wasteful profligacy for the benefit of the few paid for by the proceeds of deliberately-inflicted human misery. 'Austerity 1' needs to be opposed relentlessly, as Greens oppose it.

But, as we have already heavily hinted, reckless *non*-austerity with the resources of the planet, resources which add up to our very life-support system, can be found just as much in most of those supporting 'Austerity 1' as in many of those opposing it.

Let us turn to 'Austerity 2'. This is a sense in which, especially here in the prosperous West, some kind of fairly-shared material austerity *is* needed. So let's start by recognising the obvious: that the simplistic slogan 'No cuts!' is plain wrong - because there are lots of things that need cutting.

Trident, perhaps most obviously. But also: all subsidies for nuclear power, and for fossil fuels, and for air travel, and for the arms industry, and for polluting industries; virtually all road-building programmes; advertising that deforms innocent minds and encourages binge-consumerism; and much more besides. [xiii] An ecological mindset obviously wants to cut a very great deal. What needs further exploring, is what this implies...

The name 'Austerity 2' has been introduced by us here as a provocation to thought: because, in the currently dominant mindset, the programme for reducing today's unsustainable eco-footprint will involve some retrenchment that will be widely perceived as 'austerity'.

An end to decadence

It will be a big break from the consumerist bonanza of recent decades' decadence. For most people, mention the word 'decadence' and the lifestyles of the rich and powerful in the Roman Empire come first to mind. But the majority of citizens of the contemporary West live in a manner at least as wasteful, objectively-speaking, as those 'decadent' rich and powerful did, two millennia ago.

There are plenty of scientific papers and oodles of popularisations of them, documenting the extent of ecological overshoot at all levels: and thus the need for some 'retrenchment'. Possibly the most shocking recent revelation is that *half* of all the world's wildlife has gone in the last 40 years alone. [xiv]

Of course it varies from country to country and from one social group to another, and the rich are typically by far the worst offenders. But the scale and breadth of excess can be seen by the way China, a country still with many poor people by any standard, hit 'Overshoot Day' on May 14 this year. [xv]

This really is a bubble that can only burst if collectively we keep on over inflating it, and with ruinous consequences for civilised living.

So we need to 'think shrink'. If the desperately poor (as well as the species now being driven into extinction at unprecedented rates) are to get a fair deal, then those with bigger stomachs will have to tighten their belts even further. Fairness is at the heart of Austerity 2 (whereas some 'anti-austerity' campaigners in UK seem in practice to ignore the plight of the world's really poor peoples - some 1.5 billion people in what the UN Human Development Report calls *"multidimensional poverty"* - as well as the needs of non-human species and the needs of future generations. These are massive omissions.).

This may not as yet be a popular message. But it has the great advantage of being an honest one. And it is one that can last. For there are solid reasons for thinking that Mass Consumerdom is a doomed project. It will end regardless of whether people want it or not.

The danger is that the affluent (conventionally defined) and those dreaming of that kind of affluence will become desperate to defend consumption-as-usual. They may back any dangerous techno-fix if they can be persuaded that it will eke out a few more years of undisturbed 'normality'. It is sadly all too easy to foresee what Geoff Hiscock's book calls *"Earth wars"* in a increasingly desperate race to grab remaining resources (see also Michael Klare's 'The Race for What's Left'). [xvi]

Clearly, it is better for the coming crisis to be treated as an opportunity to build society for the common good, with the emphasis on quality of being, not quantity of things. It has more chance of happening the more people can be persuaded to embrace the change.

Sustainable abundance of the things that matter

So, we need to think of ways in which to present it in appealing ways, with due emphasis on both fairness and the opportunities for not just a more 'sustainable' but also more enjoyable way of life. [xvii]

For the green vision is one of sustainable *abundance of all the things that really matter* - such as having secure access to high quality food that one has had a role in providing, such as trust, community, love, nature and unpolluted environment - not 'austerity' *at all*, in *these* respects.

Some writers have called the needed new lifestyles 'voluntary simplicity'. Others talk in terms of 'better, not bigger' and 'sharing smaller pies'. [xviii] What we are envisioning, in plain terms, is a more stable and secure economy and ecology, with a *better* quality of life.

More recently there has heightened interest in what is being called 'postgrowth' or 'degrowth'. [xix] *These* are the real alternative to the growthism that is rampant in all the 'grey' parties, in everyone from Corbyn to Cameron.

'Austerity 1' - the approach of Cameron, Osborne, Merkel et al - shares completely with Corbynomics the assumption that growth is desirable, and (tacitly or explicitly) that 'Austerity 2' is impossible or undesirable or both. [xx]

In *this* specific sense, being anti-Austerity-1 and pro-Austerity-1 are not necessarily, unfortunately, opposites at all. They can even be two sides of the same out-dated coin. A coin that ever-increasingly weighs too much for the living Earth to be able to bear.

A more positive and genuinely forward-looking model is provided by the changes brought about under the leadership of Enrique Penalosa in Bogota, at the time one of the most unlikely places for such initiatives, with its rampant violence, deep social divisions, ingrained car culture etc.

Penalosa came clean, openly stating that he could not deliver American-style affluence but he could make most people happier than they were. [xxi]

The Canadian activist Guy Dauncey has assembled many such examples of big changes, sometimes against the odds. They illustrate how steps could be taken, with reasonable hope of popular support, as part of what he calls a *"positive vision of a sustainable future"* [xxii]

Sometimes the conventional attacks on 'austerity', when they fail to differentiate between two different senses of that word, are obscuring the really radical changes we need.

An example to follow: the 'austerity Chancellor' Stafford Cripps

Moreover, in the (welcome) upsurge of popular support for Jeremy Corbyn, and the concomitant nostalgia for the great reforming 1945-51 Labour government, people are forgetting one important feature of the Attlee government: the stern moral figure of that Government's Chancellor, Stafford Cripps. [xxiii]

Cripps is an ambiguous figure with a contested legacy, but the intriguing and unavoidable truth is that the Chancellor of what is widely acknowledged to be the greatest Labour government of all time was popularly known as 'Austerity Cripps'.

This was utterly different from Osborne's austerity; at a time of massive investment in public services, consumption of relative fripperies like luxury food, sugar, cars, fuel and clothing was massively controlled and constrained. Food rationing, in context an egalitarian programme that improved public health, of course continued right through into the 1950s.

'Austerity' hasn't always been a byword for something repellent to 'progressives' like us, and like you, dear reader ...

And so to sum up and conclude. We desperately need to differentiate being 'anti-austerity' in the sense of wanting, recklessly and absurdly (given the breaching of planetary boundaries currently underway), open-ended economic growth and more stuff for all (and in *this* sense, much of the Right is

just as 'anti-austerity' as the Left!), from being 'anti-austerity' in the sense of opposing savage cuts and privatisations (anti-Austerity-1).

The green movement and the Green Party is (or ought to be) as strongly against the first as it is in favour of the second.

In the mainstream media, such as in the *Observer* articles that we opened this article by mentioning, these two things are not separated out. We need to very clearly separate them. Being 'anti-austerity' ought to mean opposing government cuts; it ought not to mean backing growthist business-as-usual.

'Austerity 1' means: Current government programmes which are in reality penalisation of some but rewards for others. It is a redistribution, Robin-Hood-*in-reverse* programme.

'Austerity 2' means: *Not* austerity in terms of well-being - on the contrary - but a certain degree of shared material austerity, for the sake of a survivable future, in which we can all flourish and prosper, a more equal fairer greener trimming of our cloth to fit our means. [xxiv] It means downsizing from a 4- or 3- to a 1-planet economy.

Greens must always work for a more equal society ...

This would *require* a more equal society, with the poorest having a little more and the rich having a lot less. In fact, in a country like Britain, the majority would probably have less: because Britain is living as if there are four planet Earths, and thus most Britons, not only the 1%, are living beyond our shared long-term means.

But having less consumer goods - not having a new phone-handset every year forever - would be compatible with and would in fact, when done properly, *ensure* a better *quality* of life.

Are we proposing that we rebrand our green vision for the future as 'Austerity 2'? For several reasons, already outlined, the answer is: certainly not. Above all, perhaps, because the term 'austerity' has simply come to be associated too closely with the pro-rich redistribution programme that is Conservative policy (and, in a Lite version, was New Labour policy too).

But we *are* suggesting that it is intellectually dishonest to suppose that the opposite of such 'Austerity 1' should include an on-going binge of consumption, at least if one cares our non-human kin, about future generations, etc.

And living within ecological limits

And this is where Labour, including yes even Corbyn, are very weak: for they don't dare to question the idea of endless growth, of an endless binge. [xxv] Corbyn's policies on various things - such as tax evasion, and renationalising the railways - are right; but his growthism is the same old same old, at a time when what is desperately needed is something different. Something eco-logical.

The real intellectual issue can be put this way: 'Austerity' as opposed to *what*? If the opposite of austerity is a decent social security net, then count us 100% in to opposing it. Greens believe

passionately in taking care of the vulnerable, and thus we oppose steadfastly and profoundly the savage-cuts-for-the-most-vulnerable that *is* 'Austerity 1'.

But if 'anti-austerity' is just a demand for a fairer version of growthist business-as-usual, then count us 100% out to opposing it. Equality without ecological sustainability is simply fair shares in collective suicide. Rather than the rough label of 'Austerity 2', one that will be misunderstood, let's call this 'Treading Lightly', or 'Elegant Simplicity', or whatever works best.

The underlying reality is this: Ecological capital is dwindling, so monetary outlay, by whoever for whatever (including even clever schemes such as 'People's QE'), must be limited in due turn. And then we must *restore* our ecosystems. This process will involve human beings restraining our appetites.

This happier but somewhat more materially 'austere' future that we envision then would actually be a future in which we were truly all in it together ... As we *are*: for the atmosphere does not discriminate between rich and poor.

If runaway climate change comes - and if it comes it will be as a predictable consequence of the currently-hegemonic fanaticism for more and yet more 'growth' - then it will affect the poorest soonest and worst, but sooner or later it will ruin us, one and *all*.

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15. Green Parties, Green Future: lessons from history for Green politics [2015]

Bennet Francis and Rupert Read discuss what lessons for the UK Greens can be learned from the Continental Green movement, in light of the recent work by Per Gahrton, founder of the Swedish Green Party, *Green Parties, Green Future: From Local Groups to the International Stage*. This article appeared originally in *The Ecologist*.

Ecologism is still the baby of political ideologies.

In the English-speaking world at least, it's unusual in public life to find a clear distinction drawn between environmental lobbying or environmental economics on the one hand and a comprehensive, wholistic, ecological Green politics.

'Green issues' have tended to enter the discussion at a late stage, far downstream of big ideas and core beliefs, with greens treated more like a minority interest group to be placated with superficial gestures.

Just this month, the UK's Chancellor gave us a striking example of this tendency. While defending the mind-bogglingly bad nuclear deal just struck with China, he remarked that *"Nuclear power is cost competitive with other low carbon technology and is a crucial part of our energy mix, along with new sources of power such as shale gas."*

George Osborne, like so many others, paid lip service to environmental concerns, while in the same breath displaying contemptuous indifference towards any attempt at a consistent Green strategy. The truth, of course, is otherwise!

The political culture of the UK and the United States, however, is behind the curve in this respect, as Per Gahrton's timely book brings out. Beginning in roughly the late 1970s, there has been an upsurge of political Ecologism, which has developed, from its origins in pressure groups and small-scale experiments of living, into an all-encompassing political ideal - *"neither left nor right, but forward"*.

The inside story

Although Gahrton writes with the detached objectivity of the political scientist, the more interesting sections of the book are those that give us first-hand insight into the development of the international Green movement in Europe, given the author's own position as founder of the Swedish Greens and one of the first four co-secretaries of the European Greens.

The ideological differences between parties - such as the question of whether to accept leftist parties into the European Greens or only those with expressly ecological core values - led to confrontations between some of the biggest personalities in Green politics.

We can see the legacy of these debates in the composition of the European Parliament to this day: the Greens-EFA parliamentary grouping, to which the Green Party of England and Wales belongs, remains separate from the European United Left-Nordic Green Left grouping (which includes Sinn Fein - perhaps not everyone's idea of 'Green').

In the early years, the German Greens supported the inclusion of many of the parties that now belong to the latter grouping in the European Greens, to the consternation of purists.

To those habituated to a 'first past the post' electoral system, Gahrton's careful overview of the proliferation of Green parties across the world - with several enjoying electoral success and with it the chance to participate in government - is extremely compelling. It is a welcome reminder that parliamentary politics can be a valuable tool if used effectively.

What are Green Parties *for*?

Interestingly, Gahrton's own view seems at times more pessimistic: he argues that the role of Greens in parliament should be primarily *"disruptive"*, focused on the banning of harmful practices. Positive change must be brought about from the ground up, through grassroots political participation.

This view is motivated by a complex combination of philosophical and practical considerations. Greens have defined themselves in contrast to traditional parties as committed to participatory democracy: genuine people-power.

Centralised government through Cabinet is therefore difficult to square with core Green values. The argument is reinforced by Garhton's study of the fate of Greens who have accepted ministries: often, he contends, traditional structures have forced them to act somewhat unilaterally, leading to a rift with rank-and-file members.

While these points are important, we should be wary of the idea that the main task of Greens at the parliamentary level is negative: a bold positive vision, put forward through domestic legislatures as well as the European Parliament, is needed to persuade the majority that a Green 'revolution' is not only necessary, but achievable and desirable. Only in this way will Ecologism gain broad enough support for grassroots action to be effective.

Lessons for the UK

The fate of the Liberal Democrats in the UK's last general election could be a case study for the problems Gahrton sees facing Greens in government - the pitfalls of entering coalitions as a junior partner.

Voters were not told in advance of the 2010 election what the Libdems would do should the opportunity for coalition present itself. The mere fact that they chose to make a deal with the Conservatives certainly cost them support. More votes were lost because 'red lines' for negotiation were not incorporated into manifesto pledges, leading to the tuition fees debacle.

Finally, in government, they were often made to carry the can for unpopular policies, and only too late realised the need to distinguish their position from that of their Tory partners.

Gahrton describes a similar fate befalling the Green parties of Denmark, Ukraine, Italy, Belgium, the Czech Republic and Ireland.

Prospects for a pact

As Rupert Read and Caroline Lucas (Caroline contributes a glowing Preface to Gahrton's book) have argued, the Labour Party under the leadership of Jeremy Corbyn has moved in a promising direction, making the prospect of some kind of electoral pact between Labour and the Greens look like an exciting possibility.

In the spirit of Gahrton's analysis, therefore, it seems appropriate to offer the Green Party of England and Wales the some advice:

One: Greens must strongly distinguish their views from those of Corbyn's Labour, and make it clear where any element of a potential pact is a compromise. *Such distinction is all the* more *important, if one is considering a pact:* it is then vital to preserve one's difference, one's identity.

Corbyn has made some encouraging statements on the environment, but he has also been wide of the mark, a notable example being his suggestion during the leadership campaign that Welsh coalmines ought to be reopened.

Although he has since qualified that remark, it reveals the key distinction between Corbynism and Ecologism: Corbyn buys into the shoe-banging socialist faith in ever-increasing production as the road to emancipation. Whereas Greens are actually serious that, with regard all but the least polluting fossil fuels, the answer simply has to be: #leaveitintheground.

Two: The Green Party must now begin an internal democratic process to determine its 'red lines'. Learning lessons from neighbouring Green Parties and the Libdems, they must avoid a situation in which leaders' snap decisions alienate and anger the party conference.

Indeed, we need look no further than the present predicament of the Labour Party to see the dangers of head parting company with heart, as New Labour parliamentarians oppose and even fear the party's membership.

Three: Avoid co-option. George Osborne's remarks on nuclear power remind us of the grave danger that Green politics becomes an exercise in 'greenwashing'. Instead, we need to be clear about how radical and different we remain.

As Gahrton observes, several governments (mainly in former Warsaw Pact countries) have given a portfolio to a single Green, leaving them a largely symbolic ineffectual figure. The way to avoid this, Gahrton suggests, is to demand a post with budgetary control.

Green priorities

It is of course unwise to extrapolate too much from the fortunes of Green Parties in other countries. One thing the book brings out is the diversity of positions across the green range of the political spectrum, not to mention the variation in background political conditions.

Because of the first-past-the-post system, it is unlikely that Greens will play the role of kingmaker in the UK, as they did in Germany in 1998. Any conceivable pact would be part of a broad progressive alliance, probably including Plaid, the SNP and maybe the LibDems.

It seems clear that a key point for negotiation must therefore be electoral reform. The UK's voting system is designed to permanently lock out newer parties and entrench established privilege.

The only way UK Greens are going to gain anything like the influence they won in Germany is by prioritising the campaign for a fair, proportional voting system. Gahrton would be sure to agree.

16. The Rights of Nature Must be Recognised in Law [2016]

Existing models of protecting nature are failing, write Atus Mariqueo-Russell & Rupert Read. They serve to regulate, rather than prevent the destruction of nature, and are now adopting the very “market” approaches that are largely responsible for the problem. The answer is to give formal effect to the Rights of Nature. This article appeared originally in *The Ecologist*.

At this week's Green Party conference we will be putting forward a proposal to adopt Rights of Nature into the Green Party's policies.

Central to this motion are the rights of nature to 'exist, persist, maintain and regenerate its vital cycles, as well as the right to restoration'.

Currently Britain's piecemeal environmental regulations consider nature as an object of commerce within the law, and thus they prevent us from protecting ecosystems in any meaningful sense.

The best our law can provide is the regulation of nature's destruction; a mitigation of the worst excesses of rampant extractivist neoliberalism.

Quite frankly this attitude towards the planet has failed. It has failed on its own terms because the effects of resource depletion, environmental degradation, and global warming will inevitably crash the markets currently fueled by nature's destruction.

Our proposal for Rights of Nature challenges the underlying premise of this method of valuation: that nature is ours to consume.

Why we need to assign formal rights to natural ecosystems

For many of you, the idea of assigning legal rights to nature's ecosystems will be a common-sense environmentalist policy. After all, the Green Party's current Policies for a Sustainable Society already reference nature's possession of rights (see: RR 201, 301, 406), so in many ways this policy proposal simply explicitly articulates the Green Party's already expressed stance.

However, we understand that others may question the necessity of assigning formal rights to nature's ecosystems. Some of you may argue that nature does not require rights given that it is not a being that experiences consciousness in the same way that humans and non-human animals do.

Others may question whether effective environmental protection actually requires formal rights, and instead argue that we should simply strengthen the current environmental regulatory framework. Still others may be concerned that this proposal is too non-specific to be of use when it comes to drafting legislation to protect the environment.

We hope to use this space to explain why we believe that adopting Rights of Nature will significantly strengthen the Green Party's stance on protecting the shared environment. Where the Green Party leads, typically others follow: if the Greens adopt Rights of Nature, then within a generation at most, you can bet that the other parties will too.

Why is extra protection required?

First of all, this policy is not an ideological attempt to divide the Party into those who believe that nature's ecosystems hold *inherent* value, and those who believe that the value of nature derives *instrumentally* from the supporting of beings that live within the natural environment. Whether or not you believe that nature has inherent rights and value should not deter you from supporting this motion.

Instead our proposal aims to redress the legalised destruction of nature that is endemic in almost all nations' legal frameworks, including Britain. This stems from our cultural and legal view of nature as a commodity to be consumed, and one that can be given value in monetised measurements.

We often hear the language of virulent capitalism seeping into our discussions of environmental conservation, with terms such as 'natural capital' and 'ecosystem services' becoming the *lingua franca* of international conservation bodies.

This basically economistic approach will not protect the environment, because it involves a further commodification of nature's ecosystems - embracing precisely the same framework that has failed us so miserably. Our proposal is recognition of this reality: that we cannot protect ecosystems with the same legal frameworks and monetised discourse that has been responsible for so much environmental destruction.

The view of ecosystems as commodities to be consumed is not compatible with our moral responsibility to future generations, as the consumption of finite resources in the present will necessarily deprive future generations of access to enjoy the same resources. Furthermore, as you will be aware, the threat of environmental catastrophe is not an abstract problem for future generations.

We are currently seeing ecosystems collapsing at an unprecedented rate, species extinction accelerating, and global warming advancing rapidly. So instead of measuring nature by its direct financial benefit to us - a task we have proven incapable of anyway - we propose to extend formal rights to ecosystems.

This will mean that when an individual, State or company decides to undertake a cost-benefit analysis for their projects, they will also have to factor Rights of Nature into their calculations.

Accountability and development are key to the policy

Crucially, our proposal for Rights of Nature gives ecosystems the right to restoration in the event of damage. This is important because it gives us another legal resource to use when calling for the restoration of heavily polluted ecosystems, such as Britain's rivers.

Instead of using arguments that show how the degrading of these ecosystems damages people directly, with links often proving inconclusive and difficult to establish, we can hold polluters directly to account for the damage they cause by invoking the Rights of Nature.

Through making restoration central to environmental law, we can ensure that corporations do not simply opt to pay small fines for damaged caused, and instead force them to fix the damage. These laws are meant to make it easier to protect our shared environment, which is why Ecuador adopted a similar proposal into their 2008 constitution, and why the Scottish Greens incorporated Rights of Nature into their policies last year.

Rights of Nature is a relatively new movement and as such it is still evolving. Our proposal includes a number of caveats that will allow Rights of Nature to be developed in such a way that does not inhibit human flourishing - for example, by making absolutely-necessary building projects impossible.

Similarly, our proposal states that Green parliamentarians will consult widely with both the public and legal experts before putting forward specific legislation on this issue. We hope that these elements of our proposal will sway those of you who might still have reservations about Rights of Nature.

For we believe, as do many activists in the progressive south American democracies, and across the world, that this is an idea whose time has come.

17. Religion, Heuristics, and Intergenerational Risk Management [2014]

Nassim Taleb and Rupert Read make a case for the necessity of religious belief to stave off the risk inherent in human social systems and decisions. Viewed in this light, religion provides a heuristic device for risk management – the retention of intergenerational wisdom in the form of religious prohibitions and practices – totally absent from rational attempts at 'risk management.' Simply put, religion goes a long way in preventing Black Swans – a frequent topic of both Taleb and Read's work. This article first appeared in *Econ Journal Watch*.

Religion, Heuristics, and Intergenerational Risk Management

Rupert Read[32] and Nassim Nicholas Taleb[33]

This article does not concern what might be termed 'the religious side of religion' (each of us has written about that elsewhere[34]). Both of us are very symapathetic to true religion; to what we call faith as practice; to a genuinely spiritual orientation toward life. One of us, Rupert Read, is a Quaker and a Buddhist meditator. The other, Nassim Taleb, comes from a Levantine Greek Orthodox family and, growing up in Lebanon, studied the Quran and other religious texts (Old Testament, Talmud) to practice Semitic languages; he has embraced Greek Orthodoxy as a repository of ancient Mediterranean lore and rites, focusing on the practice aspect (which includes religious fasts and feasts and a focus on the ceremonial), rather than the belief side. A victim of the Lebanese war, he is fully aware of the destructive effects of religious intolerance. So to the question posed in the Prologue to this symposium (Klein 2014), "Does professional economics needs enrichment by religious or quasi-religious thinking?," our answer is squarely "yes," as we believe that religion has traditionally performed a powerful risk-management function at the level of the individual and the collectivity, particularly in preventing the accumulation of debt in systems and in preventing some kinds of experimentation with natural systems, ones that produce errors with irreversible effects. We argue that religion transmits heuristics of risk control across generations, and that religion does so in modes that only it can.[35]

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[34] *See* Taleb (2010b, 18-21) and Read (2007, ch. 3).
[35] These heuristics belong to the class called "convex heuristics," mathematically defined in Taleb (2014). Their aim is not to be 'right' and avoid errors, but to ensure that errors remain small. A convex heuristic has the following properties: (1) Compactness: It is easy to remember, implement, use, and transmit. (2) Consequences, not truth: It is about what it helps you do, not whether it is true or false. It should be judged not in 'truth space' but in 'consequence space.' (3) Antifragility: It is required to have a benefit when it is helpful larger than the loss when it is harmful. Thus it will eventually deliver gains from disorder. (4) Robustness: It satisfies the fragility-based precautionary principle. (5) Opacity: You do not need to understand how it works. (6) Survivability of populations: Such a heuristic should not be judged solely on its intelligibility (how understandable it is), but on its survivability, or on a combination of intelligibility and survivability. Thus a long-surviving heuristic is less fragile than a newly emerging one. But ultimately it should never be assessed in its survival against other ideas, rather on the survival advantage it gave the populations who used it

Let us start by presenting the problem of silent risk, as seen in Figure 1, a class of severe exposures—'Black Swans'—that are so infrequent as to not necessarily show in past samples. Yet these are terribly consequential and determine a large share of the statistical properties. Perhaps one cannot explain their 'causes' except after the fact, and perhaps not even then. If we look at asset prices, we find a large share of rare events without predecessors. Black Swans are often brushed aside with assurances to the effect of 'it never happened before' or 'times are different.' Evidentiary or statistical methods fail us there. Such methods consist in looking at the properties of past data and reacting based on recent 'evidence.' But risk is not really in the visible past but rather in the future: the past is just a proxy. The 'recent past' may not show these events and yet, typically, has higher weighting in conventional time series analysis. Further, these silent risks, when they hit, are produced most likely by some largely unknown class of distributions.

Using, for risk-management purposes, 'fat tailed' probability distributions (those, such as power laws, that extrapolate beyond the sample set in which they have been calibrated), also fails us because such distributions are extremely sensitive to small changes in parameters.

In addition, consider the class of tail exposures that lead to ruin of a system, whether the economy or the environment. Like a resource that gets depleted in the long term, the risk of ruin makes the system unsustainable. If one incurs a tiny probability of ruin as a 'one-off' risk, and survives it, and then continues to repeat the exposure (simply because one has survived), one will eventually go bust. So over time, and under repetition, a tiny risk ends up blowing up the system (Bar-Yam, Read, and Taleb 2014).

Consider the recent crisis that started in 2008, resulting from the wild accumulation of silent risk via a high ratio of debt and leverage in the system. A good knowledge of history might have given people pause, as a similar rise of the debt-to-GDP ratio occurred before the crisis of 1929, leading subsequently to anti-debt sentiment. But the 1929 experience did not effectively cross generations. Economic theories that Taleb has called "risk-blind" or "Black Swan-blind" displaced the heuristic knowledge of grandmothers (2007; 2010b). The argument made in Taleb (2007) is that debt accumulation reflects overconfidence. Underestimation of one's error rate in forecasting the future leads to more debt, as it makes the payoff under high leverage appear more attractive. In addition, such overconfidence causes fragility in the system.

In the matter of debt, religions have been potent in the prevention of debt accumulation: from the Ecclesiast, to Islam, to Aquinas (*Summa*, II-II, 78). Except for Protestantism, every Abrahamic branch has had some interdict against 'lending with interest.' The interdict's justification invoked issues of moral symmetry between lender and borrower, but we believe that the actual causes for the survival of such interdicts go beyond such a rationalization.

Compare the near-universal religious caution, even exhortation, against debt to the Modigliani-Miller (1958) result establishing that a firm's debt-equity ratio does not matter for valuation, which invited an entire generation of economists to endorse debt, or at least not caution against it. A careful reading of the literature shows that the highly rationalistic approach of Modigliani and Miller ignores the effect of

debt on error in the representation of the future. And economists calling this result a “theorem” when it is fragile to change of assumptions caused it to be taken more seriously than was warranted.

Religion counters the modern post-Enlightenment attitude as it allows us to hold that what we don’t see or understand isn’t necessarily stupid or irrational. In his technical book *Silent Risk*, Taleb (2014) argues that social science has traditionally operated under the modus that what is not explainable is “irrational.” Psychologists and behavioral economists often find that people do not appear to follow a normative model, and then suggest that such behavior is “irrational” or “biased.” But in talking that way, the analysts are usually missing layers of uncertainty beyond that of a tinky-toy first-order model; it is the researcher who is making a mistake, not the real-world person. Taleb (2014) shows that many “biases” can be made to go away by building a richer mathematical model, one with stochastic parameters. He also suggests that much of the decision-science literature on ‘dread risk’ (whereby humans overestimate particular small-probability risks and overreact to them) and ‘long-shot bias’ (overestimation by humans of the odds of large-but-infrequent payoffs) turns out not to be robust to changes in assumptions or environment, as the researchers have derived their conclusions using thin-tailed models and experiments in thin-tailed domains. The role of small probability events is larger in fat-tailed domains, and once we take that into account much of the so-called bias goes away. It looks instead like we humans underestimate risks of unimagined rare events and overestimate our knowledge about the future.

We believe that religion supplies potent tricks to mitigate people’s natural epistemic arrogance and overconfidence about the future. “I don’t know” is something hard for humans to accept and say; this is made easier in the Arabic language, as the typical traditional expression is “God knows.” Saying “God knows” is easier on one’s ego than “I don’t know.”

Wittgenstein (1961/1921, 6.372) remarked: “…the view of the ancients is clearer in so far as they have a clear and acknowledged terminus, while the modern system tries to make it look as if *everything* were explained.”

Religion and Beliefs

Let us now enlarge on an idea captured by an aphorism by Taleb (2010, 21): “Restaurants get you in with food to sell you liquor; religions get you in with belief to sell you rules (e.g., avoid debt). People can understand the notion of God, not unexplained rules, interdicts, and categorical heuristics.”

When someone discusses religious beliefs, he does not necessarily mean belief in the epistemic sense, and the relevance of the epistemic sense of the term deccreases as we go back in the history of the fixation of the creed. For ancient Fertile Crescent and Mediterranean pagan systems and what we commonly call Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Islam, and the various pre-Protestant Christian branches), the notions of piste, πίστη in Greek, *credere* in Latin, or “Amen”/“Amin” (אמון and آمين) in Semitic languages do not map exactly to what we call “belief” in today’s language. Rather, such notions are rather closer to the root of “belief”: beloved, a sense of commitment, something related to the notion

of trust. It is not coincidental that *credere* is related to letter of credit or financial transactions that entail trust (see Armstrong 1994; Boyer 2001).

Accordingly it is an extremely naive interpretation to think that religious 'beliefs' map to the 'justified true belief' standards of modern epistemology (see Ichikawa and Steup 2014); it is naive to examine the supernatural aspect of religion as anything but epiphenomenal. One needs to think of religious 'belief' as closer to a form of trusting, as a form of action, or a willingness to take action, and, most crucially of all, as a set of interdicts upon action.[36] Further, religion establishes a categorical demarcation between sacred and profane, and one that cannot be violated (see Eliade 1959). The sacred is not open to 'rationalization'—what we don't understand is not necessarily irrational, and it might have reasons that can be probed only across generations of experience and experimentation.

What we call *religion* itself conflates many 'religions,' as if they were variations around the same system providing the same functions. To a Protestant in the twenty-first century, religion has a large element of spirituality. But ancient Mediterranean religion, including the three Abrahamic and other creeds, are about heuristics, laws, and regulatory frameworks. In Arabic, "din" (دين ,(which now means "religion," corresponds to "din" (דין" ,(law" in Hebrew and ancient Arabic. *Medina*, which means state in Hebrew and city in Arabic, means literally a place where the law prevails. In addition, Islamic law was explicitly marketed as a sort of risk management, counter to the great legal confusion towards the end of the sixth century about the various commercial rules in the Arabic peninsula, with recourses to makeshift arbiters (*hakam*) (see Schacht 1964).

Religion enforces interdicts.[37] Interdicts appear to be historically the most potent form of regulation, considerably better than moderation. Jon Elster (2007, ch. 13) writes about how abstinence is more effective than rationing or "moderation."

Consider the evolution of ideas: 'bad ideas' (in the epistemic sense) can survive if they have some side benefits—an idea that seems to be absent in the literature about "evolutionary epistemology" (Popper 1999). It is misguided to focus on the competition between ideas—and their survival—as an end product. What matters is the survival of the populations that have such ideas. Those with the right risk-management heuristics make it, even if their system of belief does not appear 'rational.'

Conclusion

It is not just that religion is a helpful source of sound heuristics for resisting gambler's ruin and similar hazards. More strongly, we should say that we humans actually don't know whether human beings can live sustainably *without* something like religion. Modernity is in this sense a dangerous uncontrolled

[36] Such an understanding of belief is encountered in the philosophy of religion, e.g., by R. W. Hepburn (1958). It is present in the works of Kierkegaard and William James, and especially subtly in Wittgenstein's writings. Wittgenstein offers a reading of what religion in its true sense is. He offers a way of understanding how religion can be possible and necessary *without* its descending into outright superstition. 6. See Fourest and Venner (2010) for a list of interdicts across various creeds.

[37] *See* Fourest and Venner (2010) for a list of interdicts across various creeds

experiment. The amount of historical time that any significant number of humans have lived without religion is infinitesimal compared to the sweep of history. Given that, the amount of time that we have sought as societies, as a species, to live without religion is almost nil. It is a symptom of chronic short-termism and over-optimism that people now *assume* that living in such a way is sustainable.

Just as nature is 'wiser' than us (in a statistical, risk-management sense) with regard to a vast swathe of threats, illnesses, etc., just as our knowledge only surpasses nature's in unusual and rare circumstances, so religious man is wiser than irreligious and non-religious man with regard to a vast swathe of threats, moral and spiritual illnesses and problems, etc. The knowledge of irreligious and non-religious man surpasses that of religious man only in rare and unusual circumstances. Until we have had a lot longer to develop non-religious heuristics that work, we should not throw the precautionary, religion-as-risk-management baby out with the superstitious, theological-claptrap bathwater.

The idea advanced here, about the role of religion for system-risk management, has been aired in a manner to provoke attention and interest; we advocate more research about interdicts that are helpful in risk management and about the viable modes, religious or otherwise, of carrying those interdicts.

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18. Why 'Effective Altruism' is Ineffective: the Case of Refugees [2016]

Sam Earle and Rupert Read discuss the inefficacy of philanthropy vis-à-vis systemic problems, which require answering '*philosophical* and *political* questions' about the impact of the socio-economic system, totally lacking in the cost-benefit mode of analysis intrinsic to contemporary philanthropy. This article appeared originally in *The Ecologist*.

The Effective Altruism (EA) movement has garnered a lot of attention over the last year.

And it got a huge boost with the Zuckerbergs' announcement that they would donate 99% of their Facebook shares to charity.

The EA movement is now the world's largest and most influential organised philanthropy network. So why does it have so little to say about the refugee crisis - surely one of the major humanitarian issues of our time?

With the UN HRC claiming that there are 4.5 million refugees from Syria alone, and with every chance that the global number of refugees will continue to rise year on year for decades to come, owing to political instability and man-made climate change, surely this must be a priority concern for philanthropists.

Where Europe's politicians have repeatedly failed to offer humane and compassionate solutions, concerned citizens look for ways they can help - and yet no guidance is provided on this urgent issue by EA.

We are encouraged by the growth of the EA movement. Because we are encouraged to see a lot of people wanting to find effective ways of helping others. But this piece aims to raise a question-mark over whether 'Effective Altruism' actually is effective.

Does the 'audit culture' itself deliver?

Ironically, a key reason why we suspect that EA may be a systematically ineffective means of being altruistic is that we are suspicious of its quantitative / measuring obsession. One might think at first blush that it is self-evidently good to measure the effectiveness of one's giving.

But consider similar arguments in other areas. Does it actually turn out to be true that measuring the effectiveness of teachers is a good thing? Of students? Of academics? Of transfer-payments to the disabled?

The 'audit culture' nowadays often taken for granted is usually, we submit, a counter-productive distraction. The determination to measure everything degrades what one is measuring. The obsession with garnering 'evidence' for everything undermines the effectiveness of many of the very things one is attempting to evidence.

Our central worry about EA is this: that it is an essentially apolitical attempt to address what are fundamentally *political* problems. EA is essentially simply charity with a modern pseudo-scientific spin.

The lack of political - or any kind of joined-up - thinking in EA leads to some very dubious suggestions indeed. Most obvious is the EA-based 80,000 Hours outfit, which advises people to take the most lucrative career path, in order to be able to donate the greatest amount to 'effective' charities' over a lifetime's work (or 80,000 hours).

Thus, it would (allegedly) be better to be a hedge fund manager than an aid worker. Although such paths are not recommended by EA for everyone, *any* such advice still completely ignores the fact that in working for multinational corporations one is actively contributing to all sorts of nefarious activities - low-welfare exploitative labour, dirty and dangerous extractive industries, land-grabs, conflict over

resources, political lobbying for looser regulations etc - in other words, activities that cause the very poverty that one is supposed to be dedicated to alleviating.

Mightn't it be more effective to find a way to oppose these corporations than to work for them?!

Don't bother campaigning - just make as much money as you can ...

Imagine if EA had been around to influence the young Obama. He would have been told: *"Don't waste your time being a community organiser; become a rich young business executive, and you can pay for two or more community organisers out of the left-over money from your salary!"*

Would the world really have been a better place, as a result of him accepting that careers advice? Now ask the same question with regard to Gandhi, Wangari Matthai, Caroline Lucas, Naomi Klein, or thousands of others ...

Does EA really have the evidence-base to support the claim that it's careers advice is actually making the world a better place? The answer to the question is of course quite obvious: it is No. Because such counterfactuals obviously can't be evidenced.

The EA approach overlooks meanwhile the key point that there are many ways to help effect and affect global change, of which donating money is but one: political engagement, activism, private and shared economic behaviours - like veganism or boycotts - and strengthening community bonds are among the others. The key point here is that no single activity is sufficient; rather all are required for a genuinely *concerted* effort.

A related consideration, from the EA perspective, should presumably be how to maximise disposable income. If one's goal is to maximise utility, how does one weigh up spending less money by buying intensively farmed food, or shopping in Primark in order to have more cash left over to donate to the chosen charities, against the harm caused by dangerous factory conditions in Bangladesh and intensive farming methods that are setting the scene for food scarcity in the coming decades?

Faced with such dilemmas one fears that preference would be given by EA to the option easiest to measure.

Addressing the structural causes of inequality

The point is that most of the causes of deep poverty are structural, and can therefore only hope to be alleviated through systemic measures - which is where global and national politics comes in. As the current refugee crisis shows us, although there is an urgent need and unquestionable moral demand for emergency assistance, such assistance will do nothing to address the causes of the problems.

This is why for instance Green MP Caroline Lucas has been at pains to point out the deeply unsatisfactory response of David Cameron - announcing (rather meagre) aid on the one hand, whilst simultaneously hosting an international arms fair.

As Caroline pointed out, we must recognise the - rather obvious - connection between war refugees and the global arms trade, if we are serious about addressing the issue. This systemic thinking is what real politics is all about. Being wholistic in one's approach, unfortunately, is inimical to the EA approach, which, as we have laid out, is necessarily balkanised because of its 'evidence-based' nature.

In any case, mention of the refugee crisis is conspicuously absent on the websites of the EA 'Giving What We Can' campaign, and only belatedly featured on a small blog post on the GiveWell site, recommending donations to MSF: but the problem identified above recurs (i.e. medical assistance is useful, but is not a substitute for safety, conflict-resolution etc). It may be that as a crisis it is considered by EA-advocates an emergency situation, and not something that would fall within the purview of regular philanthropy.

But this view would be mistaken: the crisis that has been unfolding in Europe this past year is just the start, and there is every reason to expect swathes of refugees from the Middle East and Africa to increase steadily in coming years as the effects of Climate Chaos hit and conflicts intensify.

Or perhaps refugees from Syria are not sufficiently poor enough to warrant help? Or perhaps their travelling (a hazard of being a refugee!) to Europe is to have crossed a philanthropic Rubicon: the cost of sheltering and feeding a single refugee becomes much more expensive, and therefore, according to the utility maximising impetus, it would be more cost effective to help people in poorer countries - and so, to take measures (including perhaps highly-coercive measures) to keep them there?

Poverty is a political issue

According to the principle of maximum utility only those in the direst poverty are worthy recipients of our charity, from the EA point of view - which therefore precludes *any* charitable giving to things like heritage, local conservation, guide dogs, medical research into western diseases.

Indeed given that EA - disastrously - follows a conservative, growthist model of economic development, it follows that such diseases will be in store for much of the developing world in the future.

But, as we've seen, poverty is a political issue, and after five years of Conservatives in power, there is now considerable poverty in the UK, as evidenced by the 1,084,604 people fed by food banks in this country last year, for example. Does this count as a sufficient degree of poverty?

And if it does, would giving to foodbanks be an appropriate way to address the issue - or does it in fact give tacit support to the kinds of welfare cuts that cause the foodbank dependence in the first place? Or what about fuel poverty, which leaves a million households in this country choosing between eating and cooking, and causes 15,000 deaths among the elderly each year? But doesn't Quality Adjusted Life Years (QALYS) value younger life-years more; and is this right?

These questions cannot be answered by doing cost-benefit analyses. They are - or, better, depend upon - *philosophical* and *political* questions. They demand the careful development of (and willingness to act on) a worldview that takes into the account the heart and not just the head. A wholistic, inter-

personal and (if possible) wise way of both interpreting *and* changing the world. Such a worldview is lacking from the means-ends policy-wonkery of the EA movement.

Avoiding the systemic causes of crisis.

In this piece we have attempted to diagnose the root causes of some of the many problems that critics of EA have highlighted. We would argue that EA, in its drive to measure effectiveness, confuses the tool with the goal, counterintuitively resulting in the measurability of a cause as its most prized dimension.

This is because the EA movement is very much a product of our technocratic, scientistic times. With this diagnosis, one can expose the severe limitations of the EA approach, and reveal its inadequacies in the face of the unfolding refugee crisis. For example, EA must it seems conclude that refugees on Europe's shores are unworthy of help, on the grounds that it would be cheaper to help people in less expensive Africa.

But it is not only in emergency relief that EA fails refugees: more important still, in its myopic focus on measurable outcomes, it necessarily precludes any analysis of the systemic causes of the refugee crisis.

We conclude that the popularity of EA is a very promising sign - it is promising that so many people want to help, and to change the world - but we have suggested here reasons for believing that EA is not in fact an effective way of changing the world.

As the inadequacy (or rather, near non-existence) of its response to the refugee crisis helps demonstrate.

19. Post-Growth Localisation [2016]

Helena Norberg Hodge and Rupert Read make the case for the why and how of localization and the post-growth economy. In a world defined by deadly environmental degradation, increasing, extreme inequality, the erosion of democracy, and a bloated and reckless financial sector, the path toward socio-economic relocalisation becomes obvious – the recentering of people and planet as the foundational emphasis of our society.

Post-growth Localisation

Helena Norberg-Hodge & Rupert Read

Is ever more *economic activity* a good thing at all, in a world where what is scarce is *nature*, and *time*, and peace and *quiet*? – **Rupert Read**

"The most effective way to alleviate a whole range of seemingly disparate symptoms — from deforestation to pollution, from poverty to ethnic conflict — is to change the dominant economy. Most important of all, countering the pressures that separate us from one another and the

natural world would resonate with our deeper human needs. At the most fundamental level, localisation is the *economics of happiness*." – **Helena Norberg-Hodge**

Introduction

Many of us around the world are broadly agreed on the fundamental challenges we face, which include:

- deadly environmental degradation
- increasing, extreme inequality
- the erosion of democracy
- a bloated and reckless financial sector

We can make these problems worse by continuing to hand over power to a volatile global market dominated by unaccountable banks and corporations. Or we can start moving in the opposite direction by re-establishing more accountable and democratic structures, and drawing on ancient wisdom and on simple common-sense, creating a society that works at a more human scale.

This boils down to a choice between:

- continuing a process of economic 'globalisation' (in reality, this means: corporatisation) driven primarily by the deregulation of trade and finance through free trade treaties; or
- supporting a systemic shift towards localisation — working together to provide a framework that will allow the secure re-establishment of national, regional and local polities and economies that meet real human needs without compromising the natural world on which all life depends.

In the pages that follow we will outline the fundamental features of these two paths. We will argue that the globalisation path is not only ecologically suicidal, it also has a wide range of social, economic and psychological costs; conversely, we will show that the localisation path has multiple social, economic and environmental benefits. Finally, we will describe how a shift towards the local might be accomplished, and what it demands of us in terms of action.

We will argue that we need to relocalise in order to avert potentially extreme social and environmental breakdown. Rather than having corporations run roughshod over our societies — over our future — we need to put them back on some kind of leash. And, although this task appears daunting at first, localisation is actually an easier path to follow than the impossible road to 'economic-globalisation-with-a-human-face'.

Before we begin, it is important to emphasise that localisation does not mean isolation or nationalism. In fact, international collaboration will be imperative if we are to successfully relocalise. Scaling down economic activity to a more local level will be less capital-intensive and will work with, rather than

against, the real needs of both people and planet. And, encouragingly, there are countless localisation initiatives around the world that are already demonstrating its multiple benefits.

We will begin with a diagnosis of the most fundamental problems we face under the current system; and then move on to outline our response — the systemic solution that is localisation.

Diagnosis: Eight Features of Globalisation

Globalisation is a product of government policy

Although often described as 'inevitable' or 'evolutionary', globalisation is actually the product of policy choices; in particular, the deregulation of trade and finance through 'free' trade treaties. These trade agreements allow corporations to move freely in and out of national economies seeking the cheapest labour force, the lowest tax rates, and the least stringent environmental regulations.

Globalisation leads to a 'race to the bottom'

With every nation vying for the favours of footloose corporations and financial institutions, the result has been downward pressure on wages, benefits, and corporate tax rates, and government reluctance to enact strict environmental, health and safety standards and banking regulations.

Globalisation enriches global corporations and financial institutions

Having shifted many of their costs to taxpayers and the natural world, global corporations have been able to grow steadily larger, wealthier and more powerful. Most national, regional, and local governments, meanwhile, have been impoverished: with a shrinking pool of tax receipts they must foot the bill for corporate subsidies, for the infrastructures needed for global trade, and for social 'safety nets' to support under-paid workers and the newly unemployed.

Globalisation is built on phantom wealth

The deregulation of finance has flooded the growth economy with debt-based money, which banks and financial institutions can create out of thin air through their loans. This phantom wealth provides cheap capital for corporate expansion, while luring in-creasing numbers of people and whole nation states into a debt spiral from which many cannot escape.

Globalisation subverts democracy

Corporations and financial institutions use their wealth to purchase political power: they hire armies of lobbyists, make huge political campaign contributions, and fund think-tanks to influence public thinking on issues important to them. Free trade treaties include Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) clauses that allow corporations to sue governments if laws or regulations might impinge on expected profits. The end result is a subversion of democracy: interlinked multinational banks and corporations now constitute a 'de facto' global government that is unaccountable to any electorate.

Globalisation widens the gap between rich and poor

While we often hear about the new millionaires created in Silicon Valley, Shanghai and Bombay, globalisation is impoverishing the vast majority, especially once one thinks seriously about the vast escalation of inequality in most societies. The gap between rich and poor is widening dramatically, exacerbating social conflict both between and within nations.

Globalisation is unsustainable

As globalisation proceeds, an unsustainable consumer monoculture is being spread worldwide. Throughout the less-developed parts of the world, people are being bombarded with media images that present the Western urban lifestyle as the ideal, while implicitly denigrating local traditions and land-based ways of life. The implicit goal is for all 7 billion inhabitants of Earth to consume at the level currently found in Western Europe or the United States. But this is a physical impossibility: to do so would require roughly four additional planets.

Globalisation damages us psychologically and spiritually

Globalisation systematically separates people from each other and from the natural world, breaks down communities and replaces meaning and worth with manufactured substitutes. This phenomenon affects people not only in the less-developed nations, but in the more affluent North as well. Children are particularly vulnerable: targeted by advertisers from the age of two, they are told that they need the latest toys, gadgets and clothes to gain the approval of their peer group. But acquiring new possessions doesn't lead to love and connection, it leads to envy, competition

and separation — resulting in a vicious cycle of further insecurity and consumption. This is good for global marketers, but is intensely damaging to people's psychological and spiritual wellbeing.

Responding to the problems of globalisation

Because the global economy has eroded democracy in most nation states, many well-intentioned individuals and organisations believe the best response is to scale up government, even to create a global government. Yet this is likely to amplify the control already exerted by corporations over the global economy. Democratic institutions need to be comprehensible and accessible to people: in other words, human-scale. Rulers in a global government would be so distant from their constituents that it would be virtually impossible to respond to their diverse voices and needs. The large-scale structure, meanwhile, would more easily dominated by the rich and powerful. When presented with problems caused by global businesses and untrammelled markets, the solution is not to scale up government, but to scale down businesses and markets.

Rather than trying to reform a fundamentally flawed economic model, we believe that a far better solution to the problems created by economic globalisation is to shift direction, supporting economic localisation instead.

Eight Features of Localisation

Localisation shortens the distance between producers and consumers

Localisation means encouraging diversified production for domestic needs, instead of specialised production for export. It does not mean eliminating international trade, nor does it mean reducing all economic activity to a village level. It's about shifting the power from transnational corporations to nation-states, and further, to more democratically robust local communities. It's ultimately about providing people with power over their own lives.

Localisation rebuilds community and increases wellbeing

When the scale and pace of economic activity are reduced, anonymity gives way to face-to-face relationships, and to a closer connection to Nature. This in turn leads to a more secure sense of personal and cultural identity.

Localisation grounds economics in reality

In contrast with the make-believe of derivatives and debt-based money, localisation is founded in real productivity for genuine human needs, with respect for the rich diversity of cultures and ecosystems worldwide.

Localisation reduces our ecological footprint

By shortening the distance between production and consumption, localisation minimises transport, packaging, and processing — thereby cutting down on resource use and pollution. This simultaneously strengthens resilience, which is increasingly needed in a time of environmental crises and financial instability.

Localisation provides fuller employment

Localised economies rely more on human labour and creativity and less on energy-intensive technological systems. This increases the number of jobs while reducing CO2 emissions.

Localisation drastically reduces the power of global corporations and banks

Shifting from global to local means re-regulating (and, often, breaking up or taking into public ownership) global businesses, making them accountable to the places they operate. At the same time, it involves reducing the red tape that often strangles smaller-scale, more localised businesses. This would help to shift power radically away from global corporations and banks, towards more place-based businesses.

Localisation strengthens democracy

By spreading economic and political power among millions of individuals and small businesses rather than concentrating it in a handful of corporate monopolies, localisation can help revitalise the democratic process.

Localisation is based on collaboration at the local, international, and intervening levels

The steps needed to shift from globalising to localising economic activity require international collaboration. Binding treaties are needed to protect the environment, rather than 'free' trade treaties that protect the profits of global banks and corporations. Even at the grassroots there is an urgent need to share information and to collaborate with others — within communities, within nation states, and internationally.

The Emerging Localisation Movement

At the grassroots, a powerful localisation movement is emerging worldwide. At the centre is the

local food movement, which is already demonstrating that shortening the distance between farmers and consumers creates a multitude of benefits.

Local food:

- creates jobs and puts money in the hands of farmers rather than corporate middlemen, thereby strengthening local economies
- lessens the use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides
- increases biodiversity, both agricultural and wild
- provides consumers with fresher, tastier, healthier food
- reduces the need for packaging, refrigeration, and transport, thereby shrinking energy use and pollution
- most importantly, small, diversified and locally adapted farms produce more food per acre than large industrial monocultures, and far more food per unit of total fuel-input

There are numerous threads in the tapestry that makes up the local food movement — from CSAs and farmers' markets to Permaculture and the Slow Food movement — and its logic applies not only to farming but to fisheries and forestry, to fibre and building materials.

Localisation initiatives in many other spheres are also underway, from small business networks to local banking and investment, from bioregionalism to the ecovillage movement. Thousands of communities are attempting to lower their carbon footprints by shortening the distances that goods travel, installing decentralised renewable energy systems, and rethinking transportation. In the UK, over ninety

communities are now actively part of the Transition Town movement. One of its central thrusts is to rebuild the skills required to develop flourishing, sustainable

communities without the waste of materials and energy so characteristic of the global economy. In North America, the Business Alliance for Local Living Economies (BALLE) is bringing together small businesses to resist the pressures exerted by giant corporate chains. The Global Ecovillage Network links communities that seek to move away from the consumer culture and toward a way of life that supports spiritual and ecological values. Via Campesina, the largest social movement in the world with over 200 million members, opposes economic globalisation and works to support small farmers who produce for themselves and local markets.

Policy Recommendations

While these grassroots initiatives have made impressive strides, they need to be accompanied by changes at the policy level in order to flourish and expand. Among the shifts needed are:

Replace GDP as an indicator of progress

GDP does not measure what we actually value; a measure of commercialisation and commodification, it actually increases with social and environmental breakdown. It is high time GDP was rejected as a yardstick of progress and societal wellbeing.

Re-regulate global trade, with the goal of making businesses place-based

Local needs need to be put first, not the needs of rootless capital. So-called 'free' trade treaties have given global corporations the ability to pit nation against nation and region against region, leading to the gutting of laws and regulations protecting jobs, resources, and the environment. There needs to be a radical reversal of WTO rules, of existing trade treaties and free-trade areas, etc., (along with a relaxing of regulations that currently stifle local trade and finance). This is a challenging goal, and will require a powerful, economically literate movement. Businesses need to belong to a place, which would allow nation-states, localities, and regions to regulate businesses effectively. Gigantism must be opposed. 'Subsidiarity' — locating power at the lowest level at which it is viably practicable — will encourage businesses to replicate rather than scale-up. 'Site here to sell here' laws should apply.

Reduce the scale of our techno-economic structures

More decentralised, smaller-scale economic and technological systems are needed in order to better reveal their impact on the inter-linked and complex processes of the living world. Our extraction of resources and use of labour also need to occur at a level at which they are less liable to produce cataclysmic outcomes. The general aim should be: local production for local needs first, then regional markets, and finally, only true surplus or specialised goods for the global market. Small really is beautiful. These changes are a precondition for — though not a guarantee of — accountability and genuine democracy.

Shift taxes and subsidies that currently favour the large and global

Rather than tax labour heavily while subsidising the use of energy and technology, policies need to promote the creation of jobs and livelihoods, while minimising the wasteful use of energy and other resources. This would help achieve the crucial 'keep it in the ground' vision for fossil fuels, and a shift in investment towards decentralised, place-based renewable energy systems.

Shift public investments in infrastructure that currently favour the large and global

Billions in taxpayer dollars are still being invested in creating and improving trade-based infrastructures — superhighways, shipping terminals, airports — while the needs of local economies are being neglected. Billions more are spent on R&D to advance large-scale monocultural production and high-tech living, while the needs of smaller-scale producers and low-impact ways of life are ignored.

Take the creation of money and debt out of private hands

Leaving these key elements of modern economies in the hands of unaccountable banks and financial institutions has led to reckless speculation and financial collapse, as well as a widening abyss between rich and poor.

• • •

Together, the localisation initiatives and policy steps outlined above offer us our best chance of surviving the actual and metaphorical storms that globalisation is creating. Rather than integrating more fully into a profoundly unsustainable global system — scaling up the economy still further in the hope of creating enough 'wealth' to repair a fast-collapsing biosphere — we can localise, decentralise, and scale down our economies, thereby substantially reducing our ecological footprint. Far from costing jobs, threatening the social fabric, or reducing government effectiveness, this path would increase employment, heal our communities, improve well-being, and restore democracy.

Is there any chance of policies like these being implemented while the world is in the grip of the trade treaties that currently enforce neoliberal globalisation? Perhaps not. If not, then we suggest it is time for a 'breakaway strategy', in which a small (and subsequently growing) group of nations collaborate to forge new trade treaties that allow the use of tariffs to limit the import of goods that could be produced locally. Such protectionism would not be targeted against fellow citizens in other countries; rather, it would be a way of genuinely safeguarding — protecting — jobs and local resources against the excessive power of transnational corporations and banks. It would allow societies to determine the rules for business, and prevent governments from being, overrun by unaccountable corporations and investors.

Such a group of breakaway nations would be working co-operatively to reduce their dependence and to diversify their home economies, rather than specialising their economies for the convenience of multi-national capital. They could sign an Agreement on Sustainable Trade, building in step-by-step reductions in levels of trading, as economies became much closer to being self-sufficient, again, trading mainly in those things they were not capable of producing for themselves.

New International Institutions

Although global governance is not the solution, some new international institutions that focus on the protection of the environment and human rights are needed. Rather than international institutions that promote growth while fragmenting society and destroying the natural world, we need institutions with the mandate to reverse economic globalisation while encouraging global collaboration to protect people and the planet. This will only be possible if civic society is fully informed and closely involved with such institutions.

Key examples of such institutions and rules include:

A World Environment Organisation (WEO)

Some environmental problems know no frontiers (think of chemicals, that travel the world's currents; or of carbon, moving through our shared atmosphere). They are above all the problems that need addressing globally, and the WEO would exist to address them. In order to create such an organisation, civic society would need to be given the mandate to establish a basic ecological umbrella under which diverse cultures and economies would operate. So, because grave threats like CO2 emissions, polluted water, toxic waste, GMOs, etc., transcend political boundaries, they would be proactively regulated or banned. The WEO could also be the venue where cases brought under the law of ecocide (see below) are tried. The WEO would not be top down, monocultural 'global government'. On the contrary, it would seek to guard against just such corporate monoculture. Monitoring of environmental problems should occur primarily at national and community levels, with international collaboration where appropriate.

Entrenchment of the Precautionary Principle in the articles of association of global, national and local institutions

The Precautionary Principle would state that, when there is a threat of serious and irreversible damage, we don't need to wait for 'all' the evidence to come in before acting; we are justified in acting to protect because, it might well be too late by the time 'full evidence' was available. This Principle would protect society and the natural world from risky, untested practices and technologies. The creation and reckless implementation of these life-destroying technologies emanates from a system of reductionist blindness, linked to speed and large scale. Precautionary thinking provides us with a bulwark against over-hastiness, gigantism and monoculture.

A Law of Ecocide as a new international crime against peace

This Law would, quite simply, prohibit the destruction of ecosystems. This would provide a final recourse to protect our threatened ecosystems — and thus ourselves.

'Rights of nature', as per the model of the recent constitutions of some South American countries, would provide the natural world with legal standing. Granting 'rights' to nature (as opposed to just human beings, let alone corporations) would correct the currently anthropocentric emphasis of our legal systems.

A Key Obstacle: the enclosure of our minds

A major obstacle to halting the destructive process of globalisation and implementing localisation is the lack of genuine democracy and citizen power — problems exacerbated by a lack of awareness of the workings of the global economy. National politics have become, by and large, little more than a theatre, as the channels of information have been enclosed and commodified by the corporate-controlled media and internet platforms.

We have little chance of bringing about meaningful political change until we educate ourselves effectively and begin to build coalitions to take back the power of the 99%. This means proactively challenging the widespread assumptions that have been shaping our intellectual landscape over the last three decades. In this period, corporations have massively increased their wealth and power, and have influenced thinking at every level, from schoolbooks to scientific research and global media. As a consequence, we have been immersed in well-funded, foggy thinking that prefers to focus on symptoms rather than root causes.

A good example of this is Al Gore's framing of the climate issue, heralded by most environmentalists as a great contribution. Al Gore promoted globalisation which was creating a massive surge in CO2 emissions through increased global trade as corporations shifted heavy, CO2 polluting industry to low-wage countries with low-environmental standards. Global corporations also actively encouraged the spread of consumerism to the global South. Yet in Gore's description of the problem there was no mention of the major cause of increases in CO2 emissions: dramatic changes in production. Instead, his framing put the responsibility for tackling dangerous climate change onto the shoulders of individual consumers in the global North. We were told that changing our light bulbs and driving less was the way to save the planet. There was no mention of the need to reverse corporate-led globalisation.

People need to be genuinely informed that the problem rests largely with producers, with advertisers, and with the unfairly stacked political and legal frameworks that give free rein to corporations and banks, while making it hard for more ecological practices and local businesses to survive. People also need to be reminded that it is not individual greed that created this economic system. None of us voted to put in place an economy that uses subsidies, regulations, and our taxes to work against both personal and planetary well-being. Providing a bigger picture that connects the dots can forge a powerful movement to transform the economy.

Here are some of the other assumptions that need rethinking:

Is economic growth necessary?

It has now become clear that as the economy grows, jobs and financial security are becoming more elusive for the majority. The growth that's being pursued is wealth-creation for global corporations, and poverty that's trickling upwards to the middle classes. In fact, most growth

is now uneconomic: it leaves us worse off, rather than better. Built on a carbon bubble and on money created through debt, it has expanded into an unsustainable financial casino. We need to raise

awareness of the possibility, desirability and necessity of achieving a post-growth future. Biodiversity and ecological health need to be placed at the centre of all economic thinking. And, we need to ask what the economy is for, and have it serve people rather than the other way around.

Should we 'let the market decide'?

Corporate-funded think tanks have succeeded in spreading the myth that there is a market-based solution for every problem: with enough wealth and the correct market signals, poverty and environmental problems can be overcome. So in spite of our escalating social and environmental crises, most policy choices aim at 'growing the economy' by spurring consumption, exporting more goods, lowering barriers to trade and investment, encouraging innovation, and unleashing the power of the market. Far from a solution, this is like putting your foot on the accelerator when your car is headed for a precipice. Even the more 'alternative' solutions rely on the market: ethical consumerism, ethical investments, carbon-trading, carbon offsets, micro-credit, fair trade, etc. Some of these have something to offer, but they are not solutions, and do not address systemic root causes.

Is 'comparative advantage' a valid principle?

The principle of 'comparative advantage' has been used to destroy regional self-reliance for centuries. Any rationale that may have supported it is now outdated, both because of the hyper mobility of capital and because of the great need today for resilient, non-polluting local economies (which are not dependent on long, inefficient supply lines). Comparative advantage needs to be replaced by a general presumption that societies should have the right to provide for their own basic needs.

Is more technology always beneficial?

Human beings must decide where technology is going; it is an inextricable part of the economy and needs to serve us. This crucial truth has been forgotten, and needs resurrecting. Energy-intensive technologies that are polluting, that separate us from each other, and that make us dependent on distant profit-driven corporations, do not further human health and happiness. They could be replaced by appropriate technologies that strengthen community ties and create real well-being for people, without compromising that of the living planet.

Does high technology create jobs?

In the Western world we have become so industrialised that even many 'ecological economists' assume that high technology creates jobs, leading them to prioritise industrial rather than artisan production. Taking off our techno-economic blinders would allow us to focus on the production of basic needs from within a framework of meaningful, sustainable livelihoods and healthy ecosystems. It would also enable us to see that high technology destroys livelihoods faster than it creates them.

• • •

To allow for a meaningful discussion of these issues, we need information campaigns, as well as strengthened efforts to establish alternative media (including investigative journalism). We need to spread awareness through 'education as activism'. In that way, wisdom, common sense and goodwill may start at last to overcome the current, failing system. Pursuit of the new democratic compacts, institutions and rules outlined above can go hand in hand with the returning of power to localities, and the chance for people at last to govern themselves.

Conclusions

Joining up movements

Increasing numbers of people are waking up to the fact that virtually every issue of concern — climate chaos, toxic pollution, poverty, unemployment, loss of democracy, species extinction, GMOs – is either caused or amplified by the economic system

We need both 'resistance' and 'renewal'

We need to resist further globalisation and deregulation, in order to build up a movement for a fundamental system change. At the same time, starting right now, we also need a process of renewal: trying out and sharing human-scale, place-based, localised solutions. While millions of people in the global South still retain some of these structures, these renewed ways of living represent a relatively small part of our economies and societies in the global North. Nevertheless, the localisation movement is gaining momentum worldwide. We need to support, make visible and strengthen the connections within this movement.

A shift towards 'big picture' activism

Now, more than ever, there is the potential for fundamental change. Never before have there been so many losers and so few winners. People are already making change at the community level. And as the evidence of the multiple benefits of localisation grows, we have further reason to demand systemic change. But it is only by connecting the dots — seeing the big picture — that we can move beyond addressing symptoms and begin to effect systemic change.

• • •

Localisation is a process. We need to start moving away from dependence on the global system to source resources closer to points of use. Truly localised systems are no guarantee of social or environmental protection but they are inevitably more benign, more convivial. They also allow us to see more clearly the impact of our decisions and actions on the real world.

We can work together to transition to this necessary new future. Bold, joined-up, big-picture activism provides a positive, hopeful framework that can unite people across and beyond single issue campaigns:

indigenous people, farmers, environmental and social activists, labour unions, brave politicians. Rather than competing to position one of the above issues, institutions or solutions as the most important, we have outlined how these issues are interconnected.

In order to encourage collaboration, we need to make it easier to see the connections from individual ecological and social flash points to the overall economic system. We need eco-literacy; by that we mean both economic and ecological. We can deconstruct the myths that underpin the global growth economy, thus undoing and laying bare the hegemonic corporate monoculture — to see it as it really is, without anger, without assigning blame. This possibility of vision lies at the base of the process of democratic empowerment.

We are recipients of a great gift: we have the chance (which subsequent generations may not have) to steer towards a different future. We have the chance...and the *responsibility*…

Further Reading

Climate Change or System Change (Local Futures special report)

www.localfutures.org/wp-content/uploads/Climate-Change-or-System-Change-1.pdf

Local Futures publications

www.localfutures.org/store/

Articles, blogs and interviews (Local Futures)

www.localfutures.org/media-room/

Green House publications

www.greenhousethinktank.org/books.html

Green House Post-Growth Project

www.greenhousethinktank.org/post-growth-project1.html

Via Campesina

viacampesina.org

Article in *The Guardian*:

Small is Beautiful-an economic idea that has sadly been forgotten

www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/nov/10/small-is-beautiful-economic-idea

What can I do?

There is so much that you can do - alongside others. For starters, please join us: Go to www.localfutures.org and click the 'Get involved' button.

Follow Green House and Local Futures on social media:

• twitter.com/GreenHouse_UK

• twitter.com/EconofHappiness

• www.facebook.com/TheEconomicsofhappiness

20. Apollo-Earth: A Wake Up Call In Our Race against Time [2017]

Deepak Rughani and Rupert Read note two countervailing trends or narratives in contemporary global society and culture: the dominant, though faltering, ideology of neoliberalism, globalization, growthist-industrialism, and corporate capitalism, and the emergent awakening across the world which rejects these trends. Rughani and Read note that this rejection could well be reactionary in the extreme, and call instead for an 'Apollo Earth' – a global mission similar to that undertaken by the United States in the 1960s during the 'Space Race,' but with the far more *terrestrial* aim of saving and rejuvenating our only home, Earth. This article first appeared in *The Ecologist*.

> There is a mission brewing and building, a mission that needs all hands that are ready: To bring the 'un-named movement' – the 'for-life' story of our time – to a tipping point.
>
> This needs to happen faster than the rate at which our planet is approaching fatal climatic tipping points (fatal, that is, to us – always remember that it isn't strictly speaking 'the planet' that needs saving, only the animals, including ourselves, who live on it). The climate nemesis we face is now quite predictable: it is a 'white' swan event: But it could still be forestalled, with determination. If that forestalling is to be successfully accomplished, if together we are to choose to save ourselves and our descendants, then we need to see a radical shift in humanity's collective response to the rapidly growing threat of breakdown of our environmental life-support systems.
>
> This will only happen if the forces of negativity, idiocy and oppression are outweighed by the force for rebellion, for sanity and for good in the epic struggle which will define our century.
>
> **A Planet Under Siege**

The first macro-force is our dominant 'shadow'-culture of control and domination. Historically this force could be defined simply within the model of oligarchs and serfs. Today, if anything, it's become even more polarised, yet paradoxically more shrouded; a very tiny elite group on one side and the rest of human society and the natural world – in danger of becoming their chattels – on the other.

The levers of power in at least most First World countries, both in the financial system and at the level of state, have been largely taken over by a handful of corporate and private interests. Tragically, their individual and collective impact exacts an immense negative toll, unraveling the hard-won democracy of citizens, whilst 'mining' the natural world to the point where breakdown of our basic life support systems has now become likely.

The forces of neo-liberal economics, 'market'-fetishism and elite state control work so strongly against human and broader biotic wellbeing that they may put the biosphere itself at risk. Apparent improvements, especially in recent times nearly always turn out to be 'smoke-and-mirrors'. Biomass is a classic example; promoted as a 'renewable' energy source, it relies on the destruction of natural ecosystems for plantation monocultures, increasing carbon emissions and decimating biodiversity (See www.biofuelwatch.org.uk). Meanwhile, the global reach of the 'monoculture' of reckless profit-seeking and rent-seeking has been achieved by enlisting the unconscious support of the populace through advertising – 'the consumer society' and mass media (including celebrity-'culture', and most 'social media'). Our lifestyles ensure that we aid and abet destruction, without ever consciously choosing it for ourselves.

If our natural survival response was functioning well, we'd be fighting the planetary danger or fleeing the enslavement traps set for us. Instead we are frozen, unable to respond to the conflicting truths – the erosion of that which is dear to us and the part each of us plays in contributing to this, simply by going about our lives.

Thus we end up, even the most aware and active of us, in a kind of tacit denial. This is strikingly manifested in the abundantly widespread climate-denial in which to some degree virtually all of us participate; (see Climate Change is a white swan).

By consuming consumerism and all its trappings – albeit frequently laced with greenwash – civil society gets caught in the crossfire between our inner knowing and the silver-tongued palliatives of our so-called leaders.

But perhaps, just perhaps, our shared inner knowing is stronger…

Awakening: The 'un-named movement'

For: the second macro-force is a fast-building sub-culture termed by Paul Hawken the 'unnamed movement'. In Hawken's book *The Blessed Unrest* he describes the tens if not hundreds of thousands of environmental and social justice groups, involving hundreds of millions of people, emerging worldwide at a grassroots level. Collectively they represent a planet-wide web of interconnection and awakening. Interestingly this 'web' found metaphorical expression in the culminatory portion of the

film *Avatar*, which, encouragingly and not coincidentally, was, judging by box-office receipts, the most popular film ever made: Avatar Transformed Cinema.

This movement is expressed in all sorts of life-affirming interventions such as widespread activism, grassroots solidarity, myriad labours of care and love, and much more, which ultimately deliver social wellbeing, local resilience (Local Cultures) and environmental safeguards. The unnamed movement is deeply 'for-life'. (For more on the meaning of this being 'for-life', see the close of Read's book Philosophy for Life as reviewed here.

This movement is a deeper expression of who we really are when concern for or debasement of that which we hold dear finally causes us to think and act for ourselves. It is empathetic, altruistic, holistic and pulses with the spiritual force that binds us: interconnection – or what Charles Eisenstein (following the Buddha and Thich Nhat Hanh) calls *interbeing*. It remains to be (fully) seen but it could represent the greatest awakening yet in human consciousness. The true opening of our eyes, hearts and souls, that we now deeply desire, know is possible, and know is *necessary*.

The ultimate struggle

So these are two primary macro-forces shaping the 'Anthropocene' and what may follow. It's a race between the growing movement for positive change and that of ecological unraveling. Both of these forces are active, but only one will ultimately dominate. Our discussion, our proposal is about ensuring that the 'for-life' path has the chance to succeed.

Several macro-levers are at play: democracy, economics, energy, ecology, food & water availability and more. Each is approaching such an extreme level of fragility that the modern 'civilised' world we know could be brought to an end quite abruptly. But like any fragility or indeed potential breakdown, there lies opportunity, both in itself and in its wake.

Our job – yours too, reader – is to elucidate and then help to convey with viral speed a deep understanding of the routes which allow a strengthening of a 'for-life' agenda in each case. Achieving this is also to make the malfunctioning of most of the system – inherent in our dominant economics and politics – so visible that it cannot continue.

Crucial to the possibility of success in this endeavour, this achievement is the recognition that the greatest potential force for good on the planet is the seven billion human population, or at least most of 'the 99%', turned in near-unison toward a radical challenge against the 'anti-life' force operating in our hijacked governance systems. Seven billion people focused on protective and *restorative* activity *can* rapidly bring about major and lasting change on the planet.

Restoration: What A 'For-Life' Movement Looks Like

What kind of activity do we mean? This is not the place to *detail* that. But we will mention five key elements of it, elements so pressing, so huge – and yet so little discussed in the 'mainstream' – that they can strike one as new, even though they represent the well-trodden paths of both humanity's

long history of resistance struggles and the ancient wisdom of indigenous cultures (Ancient Futures & Post Growth Localisation):

>> First, and above all, a necessary condition for all the rest, we need to make our voices heard, and make them count. The Occupy Movement, which involved hundreds of thousands in over 500 cities globally, was a valiant start. It directly challenged the neo-liberal economic agenda and its anti-life machinations. But it didn't last; and in any case we need to go much further. Awakening is not just about seeing what's going on, it's about getting our voices heard, and getting a difference made by those voices (Noam Chomsky Interview).

>> Speaking up needs to include the voice of our natural world. Protecting our environmental life support systems requires two things; Protection and restoration. *Only* a massive movement demanding change will stop the destruction and initiate extensive *restoration. Rewilding* and non-monocultural re-greening can take us swiftly in the opposite direction from the commodifying and denuding of our natural systems, sparking the regrowth of great biodiverse areas.

>> We need to call out the damage wrought by industrial agriculture and forestry, demanding nothing less than a shift toward permaculture, agroforestry, organic and (above all) agroecological methods. These will be more labour-intensive but that can be a good thing, in a time when the constant refrain is worry about where the jobs of the future are to come from.

>> And modern building methods extract their own toll on the natural world. We need to see a *massive change in building methods,* significantly *less* building (see Make Do & Mend) – and the employment of low impact materials, including recycled waste, wood and materials such as straw and hemp which both lock in carbon and offer insulation benefits. Growing such materials in biodiverse habitats makes this ecologically viable.

>> And then there's that perennial call voiced now for 60 years or so; to stop burning fossil fuels. The only way we can achieve a 'carbon descent' is by implementing an 'energy descent' in the short term. This is because a complete shift to renewables is – even by optimistic projections – at least a decade-long process, and we are already on the cusp of irreversible climate feedbacks (tipping points). i.e. any wriggle room that we had at the launch of the Kyoto Protocol in 1997 has now been squandered. So what would such an energy descent look like? It means foregoing virtually all non-essential fossil fuel burning. By introducing some form of per capita carbon allocation (e.g. carbon rationing (Supporting Carbon Rationing) or tradable quotas). An individual 'ration' would allow for the low mileage running a small, shared car, or one long haul flight perhaps every decade. A serious energy descent pathway would also require our governments to return investment to true renewables such as solar, wind, tidal, and geothermal energy.

Add these five interventions together as a starting point and we're talking about an end to neo-liberal economics i.e. the global growth economy as we know it. We'd be exchanging debt and asset bubbles (and the ensuing mayhem they portend) for a strategically planned economic descent, which sees the most destructive human activities phased out or replaced by benign technology.

We can make these changes – and fast

These five points should be at the heart of a plan that, for reasons we will now explain, we suggest might be called 'Apollo Earth'. Taken together, they offer the outline of a very different way forward for humanity than business-as-usual or any of the usual techno-fixing variants of it. One such techno-fix – geo-engineering, aka 'climate-engineering' (Climate Geoengineering) – is so dangerously misguided that it threatens to further disrupt rather than remedy our finely tuned climate system. The Precautionary Principle demands that, as sketched above, we find a climate-safe alternative to geo-engineering (Safe Alternative to Geoengineering): Apollo Earth is therefore also a call to bring so called 'experts' to account, and to resist what will be their increasing siren calls in the coming years to risk everything on a climate-engineering gamble.

The exciting thing about our outline agenda here is that each point (and much more) is already strongly represented by environmental and civil society groups across the world. But we're not yet at the critical threshold for change. Short of revolution (!), scaling-up requires traction at the political level, and this requires an unparalleled collective demand. With this, meaningful change would be underway in just one year (because most of the interventions we mention above are tied to the growing cycle, to annual climatic rhythms), and human society could potentially be making a net restorative contribution within a decade.

Across the world NGOs, grassroots activists, families and communities serve as torch-bearers. By challenging the status quo, (and) by planting woods, changing how we farm, building differently, installing solar paneling and much else they beckon us towards collective responsibility.

Time is of course of the essence: not just because of the pressing nature of the dire climate threat (cf. e.g. Avoiding Climate Change), but also because of recent political developments. Brexit and Trump, though likely to lead on balance to disastrous, calamitous moves in the wrong direction, make clear at least that people are awake enough to no longer support the establishment.

Globalisation is at last up for question; neo-liberalism and technocracy are at last on the ropes. But the prognoses for what happens next being 'progressive' and green are not great. Unless we think-and-act together, the next stage of the curtailing civil rights is probably not far down the road: we have to seize this moment to come together to struggle for a better future. In fact: For a future at all.

Apollo Earth

We tentatively suggest calling this call to arms – a call to save the humans – 'Apollo Earth'. Why? For these three related reasons:

1) Apollo is the Ancient Greek God of rationality. If we proceed onward down the path to self-imposed climate-nemesis, we will have disproved Aristotle's famous definition of humankind as the *rational* animal. By coming together behind and successfully executing an Apollo-Earth project, we will have kept hope, wonderfully, alive, that perhaps we are a rational species of animal after all.

2) We need a unifying project to pull us together, at this time more than ever. As the U.S. was broadly unified behind the (first) Apollo project, so the world now needs to be broadly unified behind the project of saving ourselves and our beautiful living home. The unificatory project will require great effort, unprecedented ambition: as the mission to put 'man' on the Moon did. Compare this promising precedent, seeking to use the Apollo precedent to name the ambition for humanity of working together to meet the climate crisis by a transformative common effort: The need for an Apollo Programme to tackle climate change. And contrast this mirror-image, the disastrous possibility that the epochally-inappropriate President Trump might replace funding to rein in dangerous climate change with funding for a new Mars mission! Trump's Mars Mission

3) The Apollo missions led to the hugely-important and symbolic 'overview effect': 'Overview Effect'. Astronauts went to space to discover the Moon – and discovered Earth. This incredible jewel, changed by life, with its so-thin and vulnerable carapace of atmosphere. The 'overview effect', available initially to astronauts, became available to us all vicariously by way of the important photos they brought back and also for instance via the means of the magnificent ecological work of art that was Hollywood's *'Gravity'* (see Gravity Blog), offers real hope. By going to space, we found our planetary home and the deep necessity of saving it. And, perhaps, the passion to save it, too. This point – what 'the overview effect' taught – was brought home further by the ill-fated Apollo 13 mission (a factive precedent of course for the fiction of Cuaron's masterpiece, *'Gravity'*). The triumph of Apollo 13 was of course not the reaching of another world; it was the safe return, against incredible odds, to this world. The only place where we can live. And returning with enhanced recognition of its uniqueness and preciousness.

'Spaceship Earth'

'Apollo Earth' is the clear recognition that we are already in a state of extreme emergency – akin to Apollo 13's onboard systems failure, half a million miles from earth. Our mission – to steer a path away from mass extinction (to radically change course) – is heroic on a scale humanity has never faced before… In short the 'unnamed movement' needs to evoke – to *birth* – something radically different if we are to have any chance of pulling back from the brink. We are inescapably together on 'Spaceship Earth' (Buckminster Fuller's term); there is no-one to ride to our rescue. Only us, and the void.

This is the biggest ask humanity has ever faced. No exaggeration. In our favour, history is replete with examples of humankind rising to meet extreme demands. Extraordinary levels of creativity, leadership, innovation and social cohesion are unlocked at such times.

The analogy we'd like to leave you with is that of the perfectly synchronous flight behavior known as murmuration associated with some bird flocks, most notably starlings and migrating geese. When in flight these birds respond to signals from the flock in a tiny fraction of a second and with near-perfect accuracy. In times of crisis and elation, human communities do something similar. Human emotional signals are infectious and aligning.

Let's hear the alarm that our climate system is sounding, loud and clear. Let's prove that we *are* rational beings (as Aristotle, possibly the greatest philosopher of Ancient Greece, famously

claimed). Rationality today doesn't mean exploring options for colonizing another planet, it means an unprecedented journey into our own survival on planet Earth: Apollo-Earth.

And now over to you. Humanity needs to do something with precedents, but unprecedented, and at scale. How, together, can we midwife this into being? How can we act in time?

How can 'Apollo-Earth' be *realized?*

21. Ideas for a Radical Green Manifesto [2017]

Brian Heatley, Molly Scott-Cato and Rupert Read offer a short outline for a Radical Green Manifesto, covering various political issues from housing to trade, agriculture to media regulation. This article first appeared in *The Ecologist*.

Introduction: the big picture

Green politics starts from the realities we now find ourselves in. Human beings are changing the planet in fundamental ways – altering the atmosphere and climate, reducing biodiversity and trashing ecosystems. This is the Anthropocene, and human impacts are going beyond the boundaries that have maintained the planet in a relatively stable state. At the centre of human pressures on the planet are two forms of growth – economic growth and population growth. Both are powerful and complex forces. Economic growth has lifted billions of people out of poverty and poor health conditions, but at the same time it is having devastating effects on the natural world, of which we are a part and on which ultimately we all depend. There is an urgent need to find a new way of running economies which does not destroy its own foundations. Population growth is driving worldwide changes in land use, converting wild land to agriculture and urbanisation. The greatest impacts come where population increase is combined with high levels of material consumption per person. These are the central issues we need to address. Green politics is in practice about much more than politics – we need changes in economics, technology, attitudes, and cultures. That is why it is the most radical form of politics there is.

Proposals for Change

On Climate Change: an emergency package of reforms and action that must be enacted immediately. This should include ecological restoration and protection legislation, massive change in building and planning methodology and materials, carbon rationing measures (such as aviation and shipping fuel tax and flight rationing) to reduce scale of longer-distance and high impact travel and trade, along with emergency planning to accommodate increased climate-driven international migration and increase

resilience for that which may already be unavoidable. Unilateral action where coordinated international action is not possible. **On a Steady State Economy**: The right macro-economic policy goal should be adopted as a priority - that is, a steady state economy that features sustainable scale, fair distribution of wealth, and efficient allocation of resources. **On the Labour Market**: Bogus self-employment and zero-hours contracts should be abolished, and part time workers should have contracts guaranteeing reasonable maximum and minimum hours to be worked. **On Social Security**: A Citizen's Income scheme should be introduced immediately, leaving the current means tested welfare system in place, and paying everyone an initial £20 per week. **On Media Reform**: A system of public commissioning of independent investigative journalism funded from tax revenues, industry levies on corporate media companies and a reformed PSB licence fee. **On Constitutional Change**: Reform the political system to make it more representative to bring in proportional representation for all elections, an elected house of Lords and devolution to English regions and local councils, as well as to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland as well as more generally representing the interests of future generations. **On Land and Farming**: Farm subsidies should be maintained but transferred to smaller farmers and used to reward environmentally friendly farming systems. **On Housing**: Control the amount of money going into housing through controls on lending; provide attractive, alternative investment opportunities which support the transition to a zero-carbon economy to reduce the amount of investment money going into property; reform council tax so that it is a tax on housing wealth, and empower local authorities so they can address the housing issues in their local area. **On A Transition Plan for the UK**: Introduce national and sub-regional planning that is links spatial planning to resource and energy constraints and to job creation across the UK. This must reduce our per capita energy use, resource use and pollution - quickly and equitably. **On Foreign Policy** : The fundamental raison d'etre and ideology of the Green movement is the preservation of the planetary eco-systems that enable peaceful and productive human survival. This should therefore be the overarching principle behind green foreign policy. Over time, this means the replacement of 'foreign' by regional and global policy, through a reformed EU and UN.

22. Voluntary Simplicity Strongly Backed by All Three Main Normative-Ethical Traditions [2018]

Jacob Garrett, Samuel Alexander, and Rupert Read review the burgeoning movement toward Voluntary Simplicity (VS) in light of Utilitarianism, Kantian Deontology, and Virtue Ethics. VS is found to be roundly supported by all three traditions. This article first appeared in *Ethical Perspectives*.

Voluntary Simplicity Strongly Backed by All Three Main Normative-Ethical Traditions

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Abstract

We examine the growing 'Voluntary Simplicity'(VS) movement from the perspectives of Utilitarianism, Kantian deontology, and Virtue Ethics. We argue that, from each of these three diverse perspectives, there is a compelling argument to the conclusion that citizens of the 'developed' world ought to embrace such simplicity in their own lives, and to facilitate its greater adoption societally and globally. We conclude by asking why it is that this compelling conclusion has not already been more widely found and acted upon. In reflecting on this question we out line some arguments for why a culture of voluntary simplicity may be needed to drive political and macroeconomic change.

Keywords

Kant, Peter Singer, neoliberalism, moderation, climate change, eudaimonia

I. Introduction

A vast body of scientific literature impresses upon us all that human economic activity is degrading planetary ecosystems in ways that will make any form of 'business as usual' impossible. We humans are over consuming earth's resources, destabilising the climate, and decimating biodiversity (Steffen et al. 2015; IPCC 2013; WWF 2016). At the same time, we know that it is a minority of us who are largely responsible for this; there are many millions of people around the world who, by any humane standard, are 'under-consuming'. Alleviating global poverty will place even more pressure on an already over-

burdened planet.[38] To make matters worse, the global population, currently at 7.6 billion people, is expected to rise to around 9.7 billion by mid-century and 11 billion by the century's end (Gerland et al. 2014), compounding already severe sustainability and social justice crises. Continuous economic growth seems socially necessary but ecologically cataclysmic (Meadows et al. 2004).

What makes this entire situation more troubling still is that the high consumption, Western lifestyles driving the environmental crisis often fail to live up to their promise of a happy and meaningful life, leaving many people alienated from their communities, disconnected from nature, unhealthy, and overworked (Hamilton and Denniss 2005; Lane 2000). In this context, calls by environmentalists to reject consumerist lifestyles and growth-orientated economies in favour of less impactful consumption – and production – practices seem powerful, even compelling, from a range of environmental, social, and even self-interested perspectives (Trainer 2010). And yet voluntary simplicity as away of life gets little attention.

Accordingly, in this article, we examine VS from the 'big three' ethical perspectives of utilitarianism, Kantian deontology, and virtue ethics in order to assess which, if any, can provide a coherent philosophical defence of VS. While we do not claim to present anything like an absolute philosophical foundation to VS, ultimately our analysis shows that VS can draw strong philosophical support from a surprisingly full range of ethical perspectives. Our conclusion is that this overlapping support makes VS a robust ethical position that should guide the direction of our lives and our societies much more than it does.

II. Definition of Voluntary Simplicity and the Neoclassical Framing of Consumption

Choosing to consume less while seeking a higher quality of life is a living strategy that today goes by the name 'voluntary simplicity' (Elgin 1998; Alexander 2009). The term was coined in 1936 by Richard Gregg (2009), a follower of Gandhi, who advocated a mindful approach to consumption that involves seeking to meet basic material needs as directly and sustainably as possible and then directing time and energy away from limitless material pursuits in favour of exploring 'the good life' in non-materialistic sources of meaning and fulfilment. This way of life, also known as 'downshifting' or 'simple living', embraces values like moderation, sufficiency, and frugality, and eschews acquisitiveness and excess. By exchanging superfluous consumption for more freedom, VS holds out the tantalising prospect that over-consumers could live more on less (Cafaro 2009), with positive consequences for self, others, and planet.

Despite the apparent coherency of VS as an appropriate response to planetary and social crises, the social movement or subculture of VS remains marginal. Especially in the 'developed' regions of the world, but increasingly elsewhere, dominant consumerist cultures celebrate affluence and status on the

[38] Though this problem will be considerably mitigated if, as we recommend, a new path of voluntary simplicity is chosen, rather than the global South being encouraged to follow a North-style 'development' model. See http://www.greenhousethinktank.org/uploads/4/8/3/2/48324387/post-growth-localisation_pamphlet.pdf for explication.

'more is better' assumption that increased consumption is the most direct path to fulfilment (Hamilton and Denniss 2005).

What is more, this consumerist approach finds a sophisticated theoretical defence in neoclassical economics, a framework that holds that pursuing self-interest in the marketplace is, ceteris paribus, the best way to maximise both personal and social wellbeing. From this perspective, environmental problems only arise when prices do not accurately reflect the true costs of production (due to 'externalities'), which implies that the best way to respond to environmental problems is not to rethink production – and consumption – practices but to 'fix' market failures (see Princen 2005). When prices are right, the argument goes, people will consume to an 'optimal'(utility-maximising) degree, which allegedly implies sustainability. This dominant economic perspective thus marginalizes consumption as a subject of ethical concern. Based on this perspective, governments and businesses continue to argue that individuals should continue to consume as much as possible, because this is good for economic growth, and this paradigm assumes economic growth is the most direct path to 'progress' (Hamilton 2003).

However, throughout history there have always been criticisms of materialistic values, and praise given to 'simpler' ways of life (Alexander and McLeod 2014). All the great spiritual and wisdom traditions have warned against the dangers of extravagance, and acquisitiveness (see Van-denBroeck 1991), and, indeed, until quite recently, political parties across the spectrum shared a view that moderation and humility were noble socio-political values (see Shi 2007). Nevertheless, despite this venerable tradition, VS has received surprisingly little attention from moral philosophers (see Barnett, Cafaro and Newholm 2005).[39]

III. Affluence, Poverty, and Voluntary Simplicity

We begin our substantive analysis with a review and application of one of the most prominent moral perspectives of recent decades: the provocative argument Peter Singer presented in his seminal "Famine, Affluence, and Morality" (1972). Although Singer did not frame his argument in terms of VS, the weight of his reasoning provides direct moral support for it, as we will explain.

Singer's central thesis – for which he has become famous – is that people in relatively affluent societies have a moral obligation to give more of their money away to relieve the suffering of the poorest. Just as we should save the drowning child famously discussed in his article because getting our clothes muddy is a relatively insignificant cost, Singer argues that many of the things we spend our money on are trivial and of limited benefit to our lives, whereas that same money could greatly reduce suffering by feeding or housing those in extreme poverty. For example, Singer argues that spending money on new clothes to look 'well dressed' does not provide for any important need: "We would not be sacrificing anything if we were to continue to wear old clothes, and give the money to famine relief[…] To do so is not

[39] Ingrid Robeyns' 'limitarianism' is a promising incipient exception to this generalisation: see, for example, https://ethicsinsociety.stanford.edu/research-outreach/buzz-blog/having-too-much-ingrid-robeyns-defends-limitarian-doctrine.

charitable or generous […] we *ought* to give the money away, and itis *wrong* not to do so" (Singer 1972, 699; italics ours).

Suddenly many casual acts of consumption are cast in a new and questionable moral light. People might find it easy to nod their heads when Singer argues that we should save the child despite getting our clothes muddy, but the same force of logic applies to many ordinary acts of consumption whose moral legitimacy is typically unquestioned or even celebrated in consumer societies. Do we really need that magazine, or that extra pair of shoes? Do we really need to renovate the kitchen or go on that trip to Bali? Can we justify treating ourselves to an expensive meal out or buying our children the latest plastic toy? Most people do not consider such acts immoral, but Singer's argument implies that that is moral blindness – perhaps willful moral blindness. Singer argues that our lives would not be significantly affected if we were to forego many such acts of consumption – but we could relieve significant suffering with the money saved. Therefore, it would seem that it is our duty to forego those acts of consumption and practice VS in order to give more aid to the poorest around the world.

We do not claim here that Singer's argument is unproblematic. There are indeed various problems that one can raise with it. One immediate question is how far to take this line of reasoning. Does the argument require us to give away everything other than what is required to meet our most basic biophysical needs? After all, if there are people who suffer greatly because they do not have those most basic needs met, perhaps all acts of consumption beyond basic needs are unjustifiable until everyone's basic needs are met.

That might seem to manifest a knock-down argument against Singer, because it would raise what many would feel to be an untenable demand for us to immediately cast off all our wealth and privilege to which we are accustomed and without which we would feel/be bereft; and (if 'universalised') it would seem to require us to eliminate much of our culture in one fell swoop. This objection is a venerable one, and widespread (see Murphy 1993). But is it actually a good argument against Singer? Obviously, Singer is placing a tremendously challenging moral demand on us, but *that* does not necessarily constitute a good argument against the validity of the demand. Indeed, it could be said that a morality that was not challenging would be no morality worth having.

A more compelling issue to raise *vis-à-vis* this point might be that if one reduces one's standard of living down to basic needs alone–to subsistence–one will be in no position to carry on seeking actively to make the world a better place. This objection seems potentially more valid; but it carries a weighty corollary. One will only be justified in non-basic-needs consumption if one is actually in good faith about using one's privileged position to seek to eliminate privilege. In other words, one ought to practice VS only in order to free up time to be an activist for social and political change. This is a demanding injunction.[40]

[40] This point connects directly with the argument we explore affirmatively in section VII to the effect that VS is justly complemented by collective political action to reduce, ultimately, the need for voluntary simplicity.

A deeper problem concerns Singer's 'irrelevance of proximity principle'. The case involving the drowning child is valid because (by hypothesis) no-one else is there to save the child. If one is passing a pond where a child is drowning, but an Olympic swimmer is already preparing to dive in to save it, one need not get one's clothes wet and dirty. The situation involving people starving in distant countries is different from the situation of oneself and only oneself passing a pond in which a child is drowning. To deny the difference – to suggest, as Singer in effect tries to do, that those people are actually dependent only upon oneself, that all other factors must be considered as 'exogenous' – risks patronisingly and disempoweringly depriving those in those countries of agency, and, crucially, risks letting governments and responsible others (including the whole paraphernalia of capitalism[41]) off the hook.

This point can be developed further, into a tension between VS and the Singerian opposition to allowing considerations of proximity to matter: for the claim that we must give most of our money away to distant people cuts against ideas of Thoreauvian self-reliance and against the value of localization, 5 features of the good life typically supported by advocates/ practitioners of VS. There are at least two reasons why the programme of localization may undermine Singer's 'proximity is irrelevant' principle:

i. Ignoring (non-)proximity ignores the simplicity of local, direct action – and the inherent complexity (and thus, often, inefficacy) of what is involved in aid-giving across distance. It thus projects unwarrantedly from a genuinely simple, local situation (the child in-the-pond clear and present emergency) to a situation neither simple nor local (my – and others' – inevitably mediated and plural relationships to children far away).

ii. ii. Acting locally, building self-reliance, achieving autonomy, is (we would argue) part of the good life, valuable in itself. A simple life independent of the interference of outsiders, however wealthy or well-intentioned, is put at risk by Singerian action-at-a-distance.

So we certainly do not naively assume that Singer's argument is unobjectionable. All we aim to have done, by invoking Singer's argument, is to have created a significant *prima facie* reason in favour of VS. There are partial critical responses to Singer available. And there are ways, clearly, in which we would suggest that his argument be refined or delimited. But what seems to stand firm is the following simple insight: there is something unethical about living lives of plenty while others live destitute lives to the point of misery, malnutrition, etc. Any attempt to argue *that* intuition away appears highly likely to be pure bad faith. But we contend that that intuition is enough to motivate quite powerfully a project of VS. Singer's position may not be able to provide a clear cut line between justifiable and unjustifiable consumption, but his argument provides a compelling *prima facie* moral case that we could and should forgo many acts of consumption and give the money saved to (say) aid agencies: which is exactly what he says we should do. This could relieve great suffering without causing us any significant hardship. Indeed, according to William MacAskill, "[…] the same amount of money can do one hundred times as much benefit to the very poorest in the world as it can to benefit typical citizens of the United States" (2016, 22).

[41] On the direct salience of which, see https://www.jacobinmag.com/2015/08/peter-singer-charity-effective-altruism.

We have allowed that the principle of the 'irrelevance of proximity' can (and indeed should) be questioned. Yet it undoubtedly retains *some* force. Perhaps a key part of there as on people often fail to appreciate the force of the Singerian moral position is due to the lack of proximity between acts of superfluous consumption and the individuals living in the greatest destitution, or at least to the lack of the *visibility* of the latter. Would we be so casual in our consumption practices if we had to make our purchases before the gaze (perhaps just via a video-link-up) of a grossly emaciated Ethiopian child, desperate for a simple bowl of rice? Isn't that new pair of shoes morally tarnished knowing that the money spent on them could have fed that child for a month, perhaps saved his or her life? This is not an easy thought-experiment to conduct – it can induce guilt, because so often we fail to live up to this standard. But by clarifying our moral obligations, we argue that this line of reasoning can challenge us to rethink our consumption practices in ways that could greatly reduce human suffering. In short, Singer's argument radically calls into question the legitimacy of consumer culture and provides a robust *prima facie* moral case for VS. As the Gandhian dictum goes: "Live simply so that others may simply live." If it is not straightforward how to put such a dictum *effectively* into action, then we are called upon at least to seek to *find* a way through which we could put it into action.

IV. Utilitarianism and Voluntary Simplicity

We began with Singer's argument because it is so simple, powerful, and yet challenging. We now wish to step back and consider the underlying theory of utilitarianism that subtly informs Singer's argument and that may offer further insight into possible moral foundations for VS. As noted in the introduction, our intention in this paper most certainly is not to provide a comprehensive defence of utilitarianism or any of the other moral philosophies reviewed, but rather to explore what implications these theories might have on Western-style consumer practices if they were accepted. Accordingly, we will look no further into the various controversies still surrounding utilitarianism and instead proceed directly to explore whether, or to what extent, utilitarianism might provide support for VS.

At first instance one may have legitimate doubts about whether VS –choosing to live with less stuff– could maximise net happiness. After all, all Westerners and increasingly all human beings live within a globalised market society, in which people are able to buy things that satisfy their most pressing 'needs' and desires – nicer clothes, a bigger house, more exotic foods, more luxurious holidays, the best healthcare, etc. More money would seem to imply more satisfaction – more happiness or 'utility' – and, indeed, the dominant economic paradigm proceeds on that assumption (Purdey 2010).

Nevertheless, things are just not that simple. First, as noted above, throughout history there have been prophets and philosophers who have argued that true satisfaction in life does not consist in the accumulation and consumption of ever-more material things and, in fact, that materialism implies a counter-productive approach to life that can never provide the happiness it promises. Leading examples in this tradition include figures as diverse as the Buddha, Diogenes, the Stoics, Jesus, Thoreau, and Gandhi (see Alexander and McLeod 2014), all of whom would argue that many people could *increase* their happiness by giving up materialistic lifestyles and embracing lifestyles of VS. More recently,

philosopher Kate Soper (2008) has defended VS as a pleasure-maximising lifestyle in terms of what she calls 'alternative hedonism'. Similarly, prominent 'degrowth' advocate, Serge Latouche (2014), defends the notion of 'frugal abundance' (see also, Trainer 2010).

Interestingly, in recent decades a vast body of sociological and psychological literature has provided some empirical support for this ancient line of reasoning (e.g. Lane 2000; Diener and Seligman 2004; Diener, Helliwell and Kahneman 2010). For instance, Tim Kasser (2002) has shown that people with materialistic value-orientations (that is, people who highly value possessions and the status they bring) tend to have lower psychological wellbeing than those who are less materialistic. Richard Easterlin (1995; 2013) and others (including utilitarians such as Layard 2005; Layard *et al*. 2010) have provided evidence from subjective wellbeing surveys, which indicate that economic growth is not increasing life satisfaction or 'evaluative happiness', particularly in the developed world, and may in fact be decreasing it. Without going into the intricacies of this diverse literature, suffice to say that there is now a compelling body of social research suggesting that many people in the most developed regions in the world are not only over-consuming from an environmental perspective, but also probably mal-consuming even from a personal wellbeing perspective.

It would seem, then, that many people living high-consumption lifestyles could actually increase their happiness – counter-intuitively perhaps – by redirecting their life energies away from materialistic pursuits and seeking the good life in non-materialistic sources of happiness. Indeed, the largest empirical survey of the VS movement (Alexander and Ussher 2012) shows that87%ofpeople choosing to live more simply in a material sense are happier for doing so (with the other 13% being about as happy as before doing so and only a negligible number being less happy). While most of us are exposed to advertising messages thousands of times every day, imploring us to seek satisfaction through increased consumption, the modern VS movement, in line with ancient wisdom, is suggesting that there may be a more direct path to happiness–not by acquiring 'more' but by embracing 'enough'.

While we suggest that this 'self-interested' defence of VS should be taken more seriously by utilitarians, VS arguably has even greater moral importance to the extent it could reduce the suffering of others, both immediately and in the future. This links back to Singer's arguments. If it is the case that the pursuit of increased consumption, especially in affluent societies, is no longer increasing happiness (or at the very least no longer significantly increasing it, such that the benefit at the margin is much less than could be realised by devoting those resources to deprived persons), then the case for reducing consumption and redistributing that superfluous wealth to those in poverty becomes even stronger. Indeed, there is something morally perverse about consuming in ways that do not advance personal happiness while others suffer in material destitution.

We can go further. Once one takes the future seriously, then it is not enough to transfer consumption from the rich to the poor. Overconsumption of the world's resources is putting in jeopardy the very viability of the planet for future generations. This provides very strong utilitarian support for wide spread VS now: i.e. for much of what the relatively rich possess to be not consumed at all(rather than distributed to the poor), at least in the present. After all, if we take the happiness of *future* generations into account and recognise the vast suffering that would flow from ecosystemic collapse, then it would

seem the moral scales fall heavily in favour of VS. By consuming much more modestly and thereby helping avoid ecosystemic collapse, we help maintain a healthy biosphere for many millions of years within which human beings can flourish; the wellbeing of millions of future generations utterly outweighs the importance (if any) of the extravagances of one present-day generation. Continuing to consume recklessly, on the other hand, is likely to lead to unfathomable suffering, with dangerous or (worse) runaway climate change being one of the greatest humanitarian threats (Gardiner 2011). From a utilitarian point of view, what this suggests is the need rapidly to spread and to scale up VS principles.

In closing this section it is worth noting that the moral scope of utilitarianism extends beyond humanity and should include, as Mill argued, "the whole of sentient creation" (2012 [1863], 13).[42]That is, the entire animal kingdom, not just humans, should be included in the hedonic calculus; for as Bentham asked rhetorically: "The question is not, Can they [animals] *reason*? nor, Can they *talk*? but Can they *suffer*?" (2007 [1789], 311; italics ours). Morality demands serious consideration of animals (Singer, 2009).

Including the concerns of non-human animals can then be made to rest on plausible utilitarian foundations, and doing so further calls into question the legitimacy of Western-style consumption practices and the economies of growth those consumption practices both drive and depend on. For instance, a recent study (WWF 2016) reports that over the last forty years alone, human economic activity has reduced the populations of invertebrate species by, on average, an alarming 58%, with trends indicating that this impact will rise to 67% by 2020 if business as usual persists.

All this suggests that humanity, as a whole, is disregarding the moral worth of animals. Factory farming is but the most egregious example of amore general lack of concern. While we will not here begin to attempt to set out a complete 'solution' to this complex problem, it can be argued that a necessary *part* of any coherent and effective response will involve human beings making fewer demands on the natural habitats of earth's declining biodiversity and taking more seriously the moral arguments for vegetarianism(Singer2009) or veganism (Francione 2008), or at the very least for reducing drastically our exploitation of animals: strategies which are highly consistent with a cultural embrace of VS. As there is clearly no *need* to exploit animals in the overwhelming majority of cases, morally we ought not to do so.

In sum, respecting animal life provides yet further moral grounds for arguing that high-impact consumers should be embracing lifestyles of VS. This is part of the broader utilitarian argument contending that, if VS maximises happiness – human or otherwise – and minimises suffering, then living in such a way is part of what morality requires of us. From this utilitarian perspective, VS is morally required because it is the path to greatest net happiness for the entire community of life.

V. Deontology and Voluntary Simplicity

It is not only in the pursuit of maximal happiness and minimal suffering that strong ethical warrantforVS can be found. We now begin our analysis of various non-utilitarian approaches by turning our attention

[42] In fact, deontological approaches (and virtue ethics too) provide striking – overwhelming, and less compromised – cases for taking animals seriously in the kinds of ways we shall now outline. See, for example, Francione (2008).

to Immanuel Kant, the exemplary philosopher of deontological ethics. On his account, our moral duties can never be accurately derived from our fallible predictions of consequences or from how we imagine happiness might be obtained. Instead, Kant insisted that the only legitimate foundation for a system of morals is upon universal principles of reason and their inescapable requirements of us as rational agents. Along these lines he argues that the only thing good in itself is a good will, for it alone among all other things often considered good – such as good circumstances, good temperaments, or good talents – is good apart from the ends it aims at or achieves. According to Kant, all other goods can be produced by accident without the good will of a rational agent, whereas the highest and unconditional good is sought out and produced only by good will because it is good, and for no other reason.

By 'good will' Kant does not mean some vague feeling of benevolence towards others, but rather that to have such a will is to have "[…] the ability to act according to the thought of laws' (Kant 1785, 18), that is, the ability to act on the basis of principles and reasons. Only rational beings can do this, and so a good will is one that is motivated by the recognition of one's duty as a rational being to act according to the laws of reason. Thus, if anyone fails to act in accordance with the laws of reason, he or she is not only acting irrationally, but also immorally.

In this way Kant maintains that the precepts of the rational and moral law are binding on us all in ways we cannot choose to ignore. We ought to act according to the laws of reason to the extent that we are rational; to act against these laws is to shirk our inherent duty as rational beings. It is within this framework that Kant advances his famous categorical imperative, the first and most common formulation of which is, "I ought never to act in such a way that I couldn't also will that the maxim on which I act should become a universal law" (Kant 1785, 11). Kant takes this to be the principle of action to which all rational beings must conform and he holds that it cannot be rationally rejected.

Famously, he illustrates the force of the imperative with the example of telling a lie. Since lies rely on a background expectation that people normally tell the truth, Kant says that a rational being cannot choose to lie simply when it is convenient. This is because if the rule or maxim 'I will lie when it is to my benefit' were to be made universal law – if everybody acted that way – then the general attitude of trust presupposed by the lie would be undermined and the lie itself would be rendered ineffective. In this way, Kant proposes that the only rationally and morally acceptable acts are those that do not treat one's own situation, needs, or desires as special or privileged above those of others, for we are all rational beings worthy of equal dignity and respect as such. In Kant's own words:

> If we attend to what happens in us when we act against duty, we find that we don't[…] actually will that our maxim should become a universal law. Rather we are willing that the opposite of the maxim on which we are acting should remain as law generally, but we take the liberty of catering to our preferences by making an exception–'just for me, just this once!' (1785, 26).

On this basis we contend that – it is clear that – there are compelling reasons on the Kantian view to reject patterns of (selfish) consumption common in the Western world (and increasingly elsewhere) in favour of a lifestyle of far greater material simplicity. Right now an expanding

consumer class of more than one billion people is consuming earth's resources in a manner that is unprecedented and that will not be able to continue. With the ecological future of the planet already direly jeopardised by current rates of consumption, it would be utterly and rapidly catastrophic from an environmental perspective if such practices were universalised to all 7.4 billion human beings, to say nothing of the ten or eleven billion expected by 2100 (Gerland et al. 2014). From a Kantian perspective, then, it seems consumer lifestyles as they exist today in wealthy, technologically 'developed' nations are being pursued in a moral and rational vacuum, consisting as they do of numerous daily decisions that treat those making them as exceptions to *the rules of reason and equality under the moral law*.

Kant understood that – despite being capable of rational deliberation and choice – our wills regularly come under the influence of motivations that do not always find accord with our reason: we do not always do the right thing simply because it is the right thing. The fact is, Kant says, human beings cultivate and fall prey to their own personal preferences, which impede the free action of their rational wills; if it were not so, he claims, a perfectly rational will would never feel constrained by its moral duty. Unfortunately for the Kantian, humans are far from being perfect moral agents, but this in no way provides us with an excuse for ignoring our duty. Even with the perhaps enticing prospect of that privately-owned car, phone-upgrade or cup of coffee, from the Kantian perspective we are all still bound by the categorical responsibility to live in a way that is universalisable, and what that means, above all, now is: sustainable, at a level compatible with one-planet living for all. One must consider the whole of humanity (and beyond) both now and in the future. For Kant ,blindly following the standard practice of our friends, neighbours, or society at large is no justification or excuse at all. Given that the practices of the affluent cannot be universalized, those practices simply must, following Kant, be wrong.

VI. Virtue Ethics and Voluntary Simplicity

So far we have mostly discussed how the two leading relatively modern ethical positions may warrant decreased material consumption, yet some of the oldest and most influential advocates of the relationship between the good life and material simplicity come from the ancient Greek philosophers who, despite deep disagreement on various matters, found considerable accord in their praise and practice of simple living. Perhaps this should be no surprise, given the natural overlap of simplicity with the traditional virtues of moderation, temperance, frugality, prudence, and self-control. However, the case for material simplicity as a virtue in its own right has not often been stated by philosophers. In this section, following the work of Cafaro and Gambrel (2009), we will briefly outline and discuss the possible place of VS within a virtue ethics framework that dates back to the ancient Greeks. VS should become a more prominent corollary, we suggest, of the resurgence in virtue ethics that has occurred in the last generation or so.

Broadly defined, the virtues are those qualities which, to the extent they are present in any given person, society, or institution, make that person, society, or institution a good one: traits on which depend the present and future flourishing of those immediately concerned, as well as that of all others worthy of consideration. The ancient Greeks held that possession of the virtues led to *eudaimonia*, an essential component in a good life but notoriously difficult to translate, perhaps being best approximated as 'flourishing' or 'true happiness.' Naturally, any account of the virtues will thus be determined in large part by the form one believes the good life to take and in what true happiness and flourishing are thought to consist. Yet *eudaimonia* as conceived by the Greeks is not a subjective self-assessment or merely the personal sense of happiness, for even if one thinks oneself to be happy, *eudaimonia* is impossible wherever the virtues are lacking or have been misidentified. The genuine virtues are only those that in fact do lead to *eudaimonia* in its true form, and which are applicable and relevant to all human lives, irrespective of place or time.

Furthermore, the virtuous person acts out of motivation from the virtues, rather than only as a means to some other end. A sa result, even many honest actions do not make a person honest, for he or she may be acting honestly only in order to garner a good reputation or to avoid the consequences of being caught in lies. Additionally, the truly virtuous person knows how and when to act, and knows what kind of action is called for by the virtues in a given situation. Such a person has *phronesis*, practical wisdom.

Within this approach, we hold that simplicity may rightly be considered one of the virtues – even if this is primarily about putting the new wine of 'voluntary simplicity' into the old bottle of Aristotelian 'moderation'. Simplicity (and moderation) help us see clearly what (little) we actually need to flourish[43] when it comes for instance to things we acquire, and can also identify which things are ultimately irrelevant to *eudaimonia* or how those things, if pursued, may diminish or hinder it in our lives. Additionally, simplicity would include the wisdom to understand where and how our personal decisions will impact the flourishing of others, making us more able to perceive the kind of society and world to which various decisions would lead.

Accordingly, the virtue of simplicity implies regular, thoughtful introspection and reflection, leading to more conscious consumption in line with a deeper understanding of what is truly valuable and important in life: thus, *more conscious living*.[44] This is precisely what VS is. That is, we suggest that the earnest practice of simplicity will typically result in significantly decreased and alternative forms of consumption when compared to the average in 'developed' countries. It is also worth noting that while over-consumers, mostly located in these nations, are the clear focus for the present discussion, simplicity likely remains a virtue even for those with very little opportunity to acquire material objects, many of whom are quite justified in trying to increase their level of material consumption. While we acknowledge that the moral burden of simplicity falls squarely at the feet of those who have much, we cautiously suggest that those with little

[43] This is particularly striking in some of the Hellenistic philosophies, such as Cynicism.
[44] As recommended in most detail by the Stoics

(but sufficient)will still benefit from conscious consideration regarding the right material goods to consume, as well as the cultivation of discipline to avoid making unwise decisions in this sphere.

But can simplicity rightly be called a virtue? That is, does the ability to make wise and appropriate ungreedy personal decisions promote and help maintain individual, societal, and planetary flourishing? First of all, we suggest that the wise and virtuous person will see that the planet's ecological systems are already strained, especially by the production/consumption practices of the richest 1.5 billion of its inhabitants, and that the continuation and extension of such practices risks ecosystemic collapse, thereby endangering the lives and wellbeing especially of the billions most vulnerable to environmental change (Gardiner 2011).In the face of this reality, it is relatively simple to see how truly careful moderation of consumption and the ability to make a panoply of informed and appropriate – truly ethical – decisions can directly impact human (and non-human) flourishing on a global scale.

Yet despite the pressing environmental need to significantly moderate consumption and to live differently – more simply – many would see this limitation as antithetical to personal happiness and good living. Does virtue simply demand that we sacrifice our own pleasure for the good of the planet and the human race as a whole? Fortunately, it does not seem that this is so. As noted earlier, a growing body of work is emerging which suggests that by de-emphasising material things, and intelligently giving away (or putting away, or even simply eliminating) much of one's wealth and/or income, we stand to gain in diverse and often profound ways in the non-material aspects of our lives. By resisting the consumerist impulses to needlessly upgrade and acquire, many of us can save ourselves from financial stress due to over-commitment and debt, while simultaneouslyfreeingourselvestodevotemoreattentiontonon-material pleasures such as time with friends and family, meditation, or slow/local travel. In a wider social context, this freed-up time (and money) can also be directed into volunteer and community groups, making it easier and more enjoyable for us to develop and express other virtues including generosity, compassion, and kindness. Furthermore, even affluent societies of course depend utterly upon basic so-called 'ecosystem services' that are being eroded by overconsumption; simplicity helps, vitally, to maintain and protect these and in so doing allows for flourishing societies into the future.

In many ways then, even irrespective of the (non-negotiable) existential modern environmental crises facing us, simplicity remains a great virtue (Cafaro and Gambrel 2009), as it serves to maintain and promote a balanced positive personal and social outlook while fostering other, overlapping virtues and cultivating fertile ground for the growth of other people/beings. In making this argument, we have the strong support of the Aristotelian tradition in its defence of moderation as the central virtue, the virtue enabling one to 'calibrate' all the other virtues, by casting them as the mean between two extremes. Thus we would argue, for example, that simplicity is the golden mean between excess and insufficiency.

Finally, even with these strengths, it may again be objected that, since a healthy economy is essential for a flourishing society, simplicity should be opposed on the grounds that it threatens 'economic growth'. On this point, we simply turn the reader's attention back to the points we made in this connection in sections I and II, and echo Cafaro and Gambrel in their conviction that "[…]the endless growth economy is an ecological impossibility and a blind alley in the human career" (2009, 105).[45] Perhaps the first step to a better world involves learning to appreciate the virtue of voluntarily moderating our impact as we choose to live out the fact that true happiness will never come from things we can buy. Genuine flourishing lies beyond consumer culture. An environmental virtue ethics offers more by way of such flourishing than is dreamt of in 'growthist' philosophy.

VII. Objection: Is Voluntary Simplicity Ineffective and Politically Naive?

So far we have considered the degree to which there is a basis in each of 'the main three' philosophical approaches to ethics for VS. The verdict thus far is remarkably positive: in each case, the usual disagreements between these approaches appear to fall away, and VS receives forceful backing. It seems hard to argue against it; what could be said against living more simply so that others may simply live, reducing our ecological footprint so that countless future people and present animals can live and flourish, and so forth?

We turn in this section to what we think is the best potential objection to VS: that it is ineffective, that, while individualistically commendable, and (as we have seen) hard to fault from a narrowly ethical standpoint, it is politically naive (so the objection goes) and unable to midwife an actual transition to the better world that it hopes to pre-figure.

We believe this objection would be valid, were it to be the case that VS operated *only* at an individual or small-group level, and were altogether hostile to politics and to any and all 'top-down' processes.[46] And there are advocates and practitioners of VS who lean strongly in that direction. Indeed, in her empirical study of the VS movement Mary Grigsby concluded that participants "[…] don't generally talk about policy initiatives, instead focusing on the individual as the primary mechanism for change" (2004, 12).This characterises the movement as seeking to 'escape' the system at a personal level, rather than 'transform' it at a collective level.

To what extent then is this a valid critique? We would accept that if VS is or remains *solely* a depoliticised cultural movement, if it is ethical and apolitical or even *anti*-political, then it is hard to see how it could actually succeed in changing the world. It is not clear that living more simply

[45] See also the texts by Alexander cited in our bibliography.
[46] We do *not* assume that 'politics' should be limited to conventional representative electoral democracy. Far from it. We would include, as vital dimensions of it, the radicalisation of electoral democracy through greater presence of radical representatives as well as through electoral reform, the emergence of more deliberative and participatory forms of democracy, the inclusion of radically unrepresented constituencies (such as non-human animals and future people) in democracy, all kinds of civic actions and labour actions (strikes, etc.), and Direct Action.

within carbon capitalism will do much to disrupt carbon capitalism; and VS might then be a kind of distraction, a middle-class selfindulgence. In fact, it could often be the case that those privileged enough to choose their material standard of living might find, on reflection, that their practices of simple living in many ways depend on the very economic and political structures (e.g. exclusionary property rights) that essentially prohibit most of the population from living similarly. So far as that is so, VS depends on the system it hopes to transcend.

In order to challenge that system adequately, a clear vision of the latter is essential. In section II, we spoke of the way the system we live in leads to dangerous 'externalities'. But that concept actually still depends on the hegemonic neoclassical framework: a framework that is in adequate. Its central concepts of 'market failure' and of 'externalities' conceal that *successful* market-actors will succeed precisely *by* externalising their costs onto those absolutely or relatively incapable of effective resistance (i.e. nature, future generations, the poor and vulnerable). Major market actors will also succeed better (at least in the short term, which is what mainly matters to them), the more they strip out the capacity of government or civil society to fight back against such 'externalisation' of costs. 'Market failure' is typically, from the point of view of firms, market *success*.

Furthermore, successful 'internalisation of costs' as such typically comes at a high cost. Consider, for example, the concept of 'ecosystem services', apparently designed to stop economics from ignoring the destruction of ecosystems that it has helped engender in a grievous 'marketfailure', but actually facilitating anentrenchment of anthropocentrism and a vast new frontier for the commodification of ecosystems (Read and Scott Cato 2014), by giving the dubious impression that we can just purchase sustainability through marketization of our 'revealed preferences' – and thus furthermore depoliticising issues which are inevitably political.[47]

Neoclassicism also fails to take seriously the issue of *scale* (see Daly 1996), and thus in the eyes of many critical/philosophical economists it cannot hope to yield outcomes that can be long-term sustained on a finite planet. It fails to take seriously the extent to which production is under taken in order to satisfy consumer 'wants' and 'needs' *that are actually generated by advertisers and marketers* (Bauer et al. 2012), who need to keep us in a state of permanent anxiety or unhappiness in order to be able to continue to sell to us (because someone who is already satisfied does not feel compelled to buy anything). It is producers then who are, ultimately, largely responsible for such willful and counter-productive ideological genesis of human 'needs' (Jackson 2009, chapter 6).

One might go further still: we would argue that the ultimate consumer-product *is the consumer* and the ideology of consumerism. These lived identities are the result of a process of *production of consumer-subjectivity*, and thereby of construction of 'needs' (Bauer et al. 2012). We need a way of rethinking consumption not subject to the vast distortions that follow inevitably from the

[47] This last point, we in effect expand on at length in section VII.

dominant 'producerist' perspective just criticized.[48] We have demonstrated in the present contribution that such a way is available, under the heading of VS.

The point, then, is to situate VS *within a critique of neoliberalism and neoclassicism*. When this vital context of political economy is present, then the objection under consideration in this section is overcome.

Voluntary simplifiers seek to reduce their own footprint. Within an unchanged macro context, however, this would send a 'price-signal' to the rest of the economy that potentially hastens the growth in others' consumption. Thus, considered economically, VS would – without a change in that context – not slow down net resource-depletion at all, due to what Blake Alcott (2008) calls the 'sufficiency rebound effect'.[49] That is, by taking less, the movement may make it easier and more affordable for others to take more. Thus, in order to have an impact at the level of society, VS will surely require regulations or other governance mechanisms capping overall production/consumption.

Furthermore, it is very challenging for the practice of VS to actually take off in the first place, in an unchanged macro or systemic context. To a large extent this is what some call 'consumer lock in' (Sanne 2002). There are numerous regulatory, economic and practical obstacles in its way: everything from planning rules that discriminate against smallholders, and prohibitive rents, to a default assumption on the state's part that citizens work a 'normal' working week. In the absence of bike lanes or public transport systems, it is hard to escape car-culture. In short, the structures within which we live deeply shape consumption practices (Alexander 2015a, chapter 4).

The response to this line of objection then is not to dismiss VS but to develop a more sophisticated understanding of the relationship between culture and politics, or 'structure' and 'agency'. Granted, overconsumption is a systemic problem, not merely a lifestyle problem; but what this implies is that VS should proceed hand in hand with structural change. Furthermore, we maintain that the structural change needed to enable far more of us to flourish while remaining within ecological limits will not be achieved without a flourishing simplicity movement. That is, a macroeconomics of 'growth', of 'more', will not be bucked unless there is a microeconomics or culture that embraces 'less' (Alexander 2013). This is because the major political-economic/structural changes now so badly needed will have no democratic mandate without the cultural change that VS embodies. Just as significantly, practicing VS and thereby escaping the 'work-and-spend' cycle may be what is necessary to provide the 'free time' needed for an active and politicised social movement to emerge.

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[48] See http://oneworldcolumn.blogspot.co.uk/2011/09/by-rupert-read-we-are-thoroughly-used.html for detail.

[49] The point here is very similar to the crucial reason why 'green growth' is oxymoronic: for any 'green growth' that does not displace ungreen economic activity will be net-harmful (see http://www.greenhousethinktank.org/uploads/4/8/3/2/48324387/post_growth_commonsense_inside.pdf[16ff]). And green growth that makes ungreen economic activity cheaper (by, for example, reducing the price of oil through the provision of alternatives) will not on balance displace such activity, but will add to it. In technical terms, this is the 'rebound' effect (or the Jevons paradox): it fatally undermines the case for 'green growth', and explains why a coordinated political decision to reduce production (and consumption) is essential. In the context of such a potential decision, voluntary simplicity is viable and indeed vital: as proof of concept, and as ideological support.

Moreover, the needful changes will not even be thinkable for people, without the example of a flourishing movement that exemplifies how *desirable* a simpler life can be. Nor will the structural changes be able to be *realised* without such a movement: for VS provides a low-impact way of life – a goal – that our institutions and infrastructure should be trying to support. This is the real importance of the 'demonstration projects' undertaken in the Transition or Permaculture Movements, for instance, both of which reflect a VS ethic. Their significance lies not so much in their actual impacts on our footprint right now, but in their demonstration of a way in which we could actualise VS on a larger scale, if there was sufficient social support and political will.

Finally, VS is vital in showing leadership: we in the 'developed' world especially need to show that we are serious in moving away from the ecologically disastrous development model that other societies are now trying (or being pressured) to emulate. One will not be taken seriously in calling for a worldwide movement for one-planet simpler living, until one starts at least trying to live in that way oneself.

To call for VS without simultaneously seeking for systemic change that will facilitate that way of life and scale up its benefits is empty. To call for systemic political and macroeconomic change for socio-environmental justice without simultaneously starting to pursue voluntary simplicity is blind: citizens will struggle to see how to orient their actions until they can see a social movement already starting to be put into action that reimagines the good life, beyond consumer culture. We envisage then a virtuous circle: of actual bottom-up moves toward VS working hand-in hand with societal political changes that increasingly enable such moves, and enable them to be scaled up.

This constitutes our response then to the objection of ineffectiveness and political naivety, the best objection we think possible against VS. We argue that such a living strategy can be effective, provided it aims to be a driving force of (and driven by), rather than alienated from or antagonistic to, broader macro change. And when one sees this, one see show, properly understood and responded to, this objection turns into an asset for the VS movement. A culture that embraced simpler living could be astonishingly effective, if pursued complementarily with the objective of a societal and global 'green' political transition. Such a movement could provide the cultural conditions in which a steady-state or post-growth economy could take root.

So what is needed is an ethic that thinks as a community, as a society, and as an ecosystem, that is politically aware and certainly not in horror of political collective action, and that seeks to actualise a virtuous circle between cultural and political change. There is no reason to believe that the approaches considered in sections III-VI above need be incompatible with such an ethic. On the contrary. Without an ethics of VS embraced atthe philosophical and cultural level it is hard to imagine a politics of simplicity ever taking root, and hard to imagine a politics of ecology flourishing.

VIII. Conclusion

We have seen that it is hard to argue against voluntary simplicity. The main intelligent objection to it, indeed, is that it should in a sense be less voluntary, and more strongly encouraged and

even (ultimately) required by public authorities. We hope in the previous section to have shown how that objection can in the end strengthen the case for VS, rather than weaken it. In a democracy, the scale and speed of change required of us, if we are not to devastate our posterity, will be impossible without a grassroots movement showing how it is possible and desirable, pre-figuring it and starting to build it; and that grassroots movement needs macro change too, to facilitate it and to scale it up and make it not only thinkable but actual globally.

We maintain then that a very plausible ethical case can be and has here been made for VS, from the relatively comprehensive range of perspectives reviewed. This suggests that there is something of deep moral significance to this way of life that is not sufficiently recognised. That VS is in many ways a no-brainer – something that anybody with any acceptable ethical worldview should support.

To the extent that we are correct, the main immediate practical implication is that VS should take a more central place in our education (including the philosophy curriculum) and that the casual acceptance of consumer cultures should be more explicitly and regularly challenged. This may be particularly confronting for those of us in affluent societies, whose lifestyles are being called into question. Nevertheless, we hope that this paper provokes a broader discussion and deeper personal reflection about the ethical weight of VS and its political significance, especially in an age of consumer malaise, gross inequality, and ever-deepening ecological crises.

Indeed, we think that the real issue raised by the compellingness of our conclusion in favour of VS, even across very different ethical traditions, is: *Why hasn't everyone already recognised this? And started to act on it?* We suspect that the answer is: *because* it is uncomfortable; *because* it will require us to change our lives, and we resist giving up our many petty luxuries. As Wittgenstein notes (1993), the real problem in philosophy is typically one of the *will*, not of the intellect. At some level, we all *know* that how we are living is wrong. The issue is: having the will power to face this and change it. Attention needs to shift now to the barriers – political, but also personal – standing in the way of a major shift toward VS. We need to *will* a simpler life–*and* we need to will whatever it takes to overcome our unethical or simply lazy resistance to that will.

We contend that this article has shown how voluntary simplicity provides an essential part of the essential response to the epochal overlapping challenges facing humanity. And that we now need, of our own free will, to step up to those challenges: through changing our lives, both individually and together.[50]

[50] Thanks to the reviewers for comments that have helped us significantly to improve this paper.

23. Fully automated luxury barbarism [2020]

Atus Mariqueo-Russell and Rupert Read offer a critique of Aaron Bastani's *Fully Automated Luxury Communism* (FALC). Developing a position that critiques the materialism, consumerism, and industrial growthism of *both* Neoliberalism and Bastani's vision of a 'communistic' alternative, Read and Marqueo-Russell note that the concept of FALC is 'improbable, unhelpful and frankly undesirable blueprint for our collective future: improbable because it glosses over the ecological reality of our desperate global predicament, unhelpful because at a time when we are heading for global ecological collapse FALC advocates more climate-wrecking economic activity, and undesirable because the theory is grounded on a discredited and corrosive vision of human wellbeing.' This article first appeared in *Radical Philosophy*.

'This is not a book about the future but about a present that goes unacknowledged', Aaron Bastani writes in *Fully Automated Luxury Communism*. Bastani does not set out to describe what an ideal communist society would look like. Instead, he spends the bulk of his book making the argument that capitalism is unable to cope with a set of problems that will eventually lead to its destruction and implores us instead to create a better economic model built around the creation and distribution of abundance. What makes the book interesting is that the problems its author identifies are primarily found in capitalism's relationship to technology; and in particular, in technology's potential to eliminate the scarcity that capitalism depends upon. Bastani argues that the capacity of technology to eliminate scarcity could, under the right social arrangements, lead to shared opulence: that is, Fully Automated Luxury Communism [FALC]. He paints a picture of a future where all people could live lives equivalent to that of modern-day billionaires: 'Luxury will pervade everything as society based on waged work becomes as much a relic of history as the feudal peasant and medieval knight'.

Yet, FALC is an improbable, unhelpful and frankly undesirable blueprint for our collective future: improbable because it glosses over the ecological reality of our desperate global predicament, unhelpful because at a time when we are heading for global ecological collapse FALC advocates more climate-wrecking economic activity, and undesirable because the theory is grounded on a discredited and corrosive vision of human wellbeing.

Fully Automated Luxury Communism begins in his first section by identifying five global crises set to worsen under existing social conditions: global over-heating, resource scarcity, an aging non-productive population, a growing surplus of the global poor, and technology-driven unemployment. While 'green' concerns occupy two of his great crises, Bastani considers technology-driven unemployment the most determinative threat to our society. The third section of the book is dedicated to outlining some of the features that FALC ought to contain – notably, Universal Basic Services. However, the second section, which considers how technologies might undermine capitalism, occupies the bulk of the book. Here Bastani sets out to convince his readers that the current technological trajectory can eliminate poverty and deliver opulence if combined with new economic and social arrangements.

Fully Automated Luxury Communism is a love letter to technology. It sets out an ambitious stall about what our future could look like, making even the most ardent defenders of technophilic neoliberalism look like dour pessimists. Bastani claims that increasing automation will render much of the world's population surplus to economic requirements. He identifies the potential for limitless renewable energy to solve the climate crisis while continuing to increase production. Unfortunately, this is a non-sequitur for reasons made clear some time ago by ecological economist Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen and underscored by many recent analyses of renewable energy. Entropic limitations – not to mention resource-limits (the key components of solar technology are called '*rare* earths' for a reason) – make it unlikely that an Earth operating within ecological limits would make it possible to access to more than a small fraction of the current bonanza of energy that we experience in the flush of the fossil fuel bubble. Bastani falls into the common trap of modelling an allegedly exponentially-improving energy future on the exponential improvement (until recently) in digital technologies' capability. This widespread but ill-founded mode of modelling has, however, been comprehensively debunked; Bastani, in his enthusiasm for an energy-version of Moore's Law, ignores the Shockley-Queiser limit to the efficiency gains possible in solar-voltaic cells, a limit we are already quite close to, and he similarly ignores the Betz limit to improvements in the efficiency of wind turbines.

After outlining how scarcity in labour and clean energy will become negligible as technology-fuelled abundance is created, Bastani argues that asteroid mining could also render resource scarcity obsolete. Taken together, these three claims are perhaps the most important for Bastani's book, as between them they outline how we can supposedly eliminate the need for labour (through automation), the need for limitless clean energy (through renewables), and resource scarcity (through asteroid mining).

Bastani does a good job of making asteroid mining seem a lot more plausible than may intuitively appear to be the case, and he delves into contemporary advances in all these areas. However, despite the care that evidently went into researching this project, there are good reasons to think that Bastani has fatally overstated the potential of technology to deliver us into the near-limitless abundance that FALC depends upon. In an era of fossil-fuelled climate breakdown, in which energy will necessarily be scarce, how can it possibly make sense to blow huge quantities of our small 'energy budget' on space travel of any kind? But the empirical failure of Bastani's technophilia is most apparent in his discussion of clean energy.

Bastani believes that through harnessing renewables we can eliminate carbon emissions of energy production. However, despite growth in renewables globally, the last three years have broken records for global emissions (as well as 2016 breaking the record for temperature); in the context of a growthist economy, growing the renewables sector doesn't by itself necessarily accomplish any diminution of fossil fuels. The green economist Tim Jackson has done invaluable work in highlighting how the growth in climate-wrecking emissions is intimately tied up with growth in economic activity. His book *Prosperity Without Growth* tackles the myth that increased efficiency in the economy added to the growth of green energy makes continuing to grow the economy a feasible ecologically-compatible economic policy. Instead, he illustrates that the 'decoupling' of economic activity from

emissions that neoliberals (and now FALC) have promised for so long is simply not happening at anywhere near the scale required to avert catastrophic global warming.

Bastani cites data that, 'In the UK for instance, energy consumption peaked at the turn of the millennium, and has fallen by 2 per cent every year since. This means that despite higher living standards and a larger population, Britain's energy use in 2018 is actually lower than it was in 1970 – this in a country far from energy poor'. This paints an optimistic picture of progress meant to encourage readers that renewables are putting us on the right track to climate stability. Yet, the story of UK emissions falling by 2% a year does not include the embedded emissions present in all the products that the UK imports. Once you include embedded emissions, the UK's carbon footprint has reduced in the past twenty years by far less than 2% per annum, somewhere between 0.5% and 1% per annum at best. The reality is that the UK has simply outsourced its climate-wrecking emissions along with much of its production to overseas.

At a time when the scientific consensus is that catastrophe awaits if we do not drastically reduce carbon emissions, Bastani's naïve and hyper-optimistic political philosophy advocates creating conditions where everyone has the consumption patterns of billionaires. His position is completely dependent upon new renewable technologies advancing at a far faster rate than our climate and ecology collapses. This is irresponsible – a reckless bet, based on inadequate evidence. An ecologically wise politics requires serious reduction in consumption to go alongside heavy investment in growth in renewables and this is something that FALC does not countenance.

Fully Automated Luxury Communism argues that *if* automation massively increases, and *if* clean renewable technologies massively advance, and *if* asteroid mining becomes viable, *then* FALC is both possible and desirable. But these hypotheticals obscure a more likely outcome: *if* we fail to radically reduce emissions, *then* climate and ecological catastrophe certainly awaits.

Bastani demonstrates an awareness of these sorts of criticisms, but he tends to imply that a green politics of living within planetary limits is an austere and impoverished vision. For instance, he writes that, 'To the green movement of the twentieth century this is heretical. Yet it is they who, for too long, unwisely echoed the claim that "small is beautiful" and that the only way to save our planet was to retreat from modernity itself'. Consequently, Bastani makes his alternative pitch as 'advancing a red-green politics which revives ideals of progress and common plenty'. Yet, it is worth questioning whether increasing consumption patterns need form a part of this 'progress'. Would achieving the consumption patterns of billionaires really improve our wellbeing and allow us to further develop our capacities than more modest levels of consumption? Probably not. The literature in economics on the decreasing marginal utility of wealth demonstrates that, beyond a certain level, increases in wealth do not lead to increases in self-reported happiness. Given that this is the case, one has to question what exactly is motivating the 'luxury' in fully automated luxury communism.

Bastani equates luxury with wellbeing and downplays other aspects of flourishing such as community and friendship. It is these sorts of values that a deep green philosophy can make room for while

simultaneously reducing consumption. Automation and luxury are not necessary to human wellbeing, and certainly not essential enough to it to risk devastating the only home we have, our planet.

There is a telling line in the book when Bastani discusses resource scarcity and writes that 'the limits of the earth would confine post-capitalism to conditions of abiding scarcity. The realm of freedom would remain out of reach'. 'Freedom' in this passage is defined in much the same way in FALC as it is in neoliberalism: through access to opulence and through the capacity to consume. Though Bastani proposes a different model of wealth distribution, the values he shares with the neoliberal paradigm may explain part of the success of his book. There is something deeply conservative about his adherence to the values of materialism and consumerism. These values have participated in driving us to the edge of climatic and ecological collapse, which can only be averted by radically and rapidly transforming society.

Bastani's book can be read symptomatically as typifying a particular wish-fulfilment-fantasy style of thinking, characteristic of our time – more science fiction than practical manifesto. But while he has correctly identified some of the problems of the present, Bastani's vision of the future is ironically outmoded. A political vision that equates wellbeing with abundance needs to be retired, if intelligent life on this planet is to have any realistic chance of outlasting the ecological emergency. We urgently need to face the brutal reality that we are not flying out to the stars but heading towards ecological collapse. The only conceivable way to stave off disaster is to be free of outdated fantasies and to strive collectively to soften our crash-landing.

24. What 21st Century Books Will Merit Close Reading by 2050? [2021]

Frank Scavelli and Rupert Read suggest ten books: *Entropia* by Samuel Alexander; *Down to* Earth by Bruno Latour; *The Overstory* by Richard Powers; *Aurora* by Kim Stanley Robinson; *Lean Logic: A Dictionary for the Future and How to Survive It* by David Fleming; *Kill All Normies* by Angela Nagle; *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* by Mark Fisher; *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins*; The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western Worl*d by Iain McGilchrist; *Sand Talk: How Indigenous Thinking Can Save the World* by Tyson Yunkaporta. This article first appeared in *Econ Journal Watch*.

1. **Samuel Alexander**, *Entropia*. *Entropia* by Samuel Alexander provides a worthwhile, semi-novelized account of the process of both industrial-civilization breakdown, and attempts to build a new civilization in the aftermath. Given the fact that we, as a global civilization, continue to deplete our rapidly diminishing 'carbon budget,' amidst a more general ecocide, without any real net movement toward anything genuinely worth calling 'sustainability', Alexander's book may be as it were all too practically relevant to someone in 2050. The key reason for reading Alexander's book is the power of the astonishing 'reveal' near the end, about what is actually going on in the semi-utopia of Entropia. We won't reveal it here, but let's just say that anyone reading this book in 2050 will have good textual reason to think back to the present time.

2. **Bruno Latour**, *Down to Earth*. Latour's *Down to Earth* should be regarded as among the truly worthwhile and pathbreaking contributions to political theory and philosophy of this century, and is the most important book he has yet written. Latour's core argument concerns the need to become 'terrestrial' again (hence coming, socially and politically, 'down to earth'), in contrast to the view, characteristic of modernity, of the Earth as a reified scientific object—a planet among planets, and wild nature, near and far, a thing to be studied under microscope and telescope. As opposed to: our home, our place. What is truly brilliant about Latour's book, however, is his interweaving of this apt philosophical analysis with the emergence, and lately, breakdown of globalization and its 'modernizing' drive, as well as his corresponding explanation of the emergent neofascist politics of Trump *et al*. *Down to Earth* will likely be *de rigueur* for anyone wishing to understand how, for good or ill, we arrived at the world of 2050.

3. **Richard Powers**, *The Overstory*. Among the very greatest of all novels yet written in the 21st century, *The Overstory* lends real emotional resonance to a visceral conjuring of our ongoing destruction of the natural world, by way of being centred as much in tree-lives as in human lives. Moreover, it contains a remarkable, vivid depiction of ecological nonviolent direct action in the USA, of roughly the EarthFirst! variety, which one of us (Read) has had personal involvement in: such NVDA in defence of trees will be essential for the next generation, if there is to be a habitable world by 2050.

4. **Kim Stanley Robinson**, *Aurora*. Another astonishing novel, and perhaps the greatest from the rich KSR stable, *Aurora* is that rarest of things: a realistic scifi story. It tells the story of a group of would-be colonists en route to colonize an 'Earth analog' planet in the Tau Ceti system. The journey is fantastically long and difficult. Unsurprisingly, the minimal biological life on the planet, in the form of hard-to-detect and rapid-acting prions, proves totally disastrous for any hope of colonization, after generations of space travel. This novel serves as a reminder that dreams of space-faring and interstellar colonization are just that—dreams, mere whimsies with no prospect whatsoever of being more than that—for the longforeseeable future. Perhaps we would be better off concentrating on making the best of things on the world we, in fact, evolved on? A lesson for those on an even more depleted Earth, decades from now, than our own.

5. **David Fleming**, *Lean Logic: A Dictionary for the Future and How to Survive It*. Fleming's magisterial *Lean Logic* stands in a class of its own. Written over the course of thirty years, Fleming's book is an integrated dictionary of topics relevant to a rebuilding of human society in the approaching post-fossil fuel, climate change-ravaged world. It would be impossible both to canvas the sheer variety of subjects covered, as well as the implacable scholarly rigour and lively rhetoric Fleming provides in their discussion. To name just one of the hundreds of subjects, Fleming details the workings of a localized and communal, 'old Common Law'-based legal system, modelled on those extant throughout Britain up to the enclosure period. *Lean Logic* will be an indispensable practical guide, as well as philosophical resource, for those coping with the world of 2050.

6. **Angela Nagle**, *Kill All Normies*. A key question for the denizens of 2050 will likely be: why was so much time wasted, while there remained a chance to make significant changes, the impact of which would have exponentially improved the lot of contemporary (2050) humanity? Why did the system remain unaltered for decades, despite full knowledge of myriad, existentially-threatening problems? Angela Nagle's *Kill All Normies* is a worthwhile read in this regard. Nagle chronicles the embrace of the 'culture war' by both the Right and Left, a facile version of (a non-)politics which seeks to portray an identity rather than effect social change. *Kill All Normies* is and will be key reading for anyone wishing to overcome this mode of discourse, with the goal of radical and unificatory social change in mind.

7. **Mark Fisher**, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* Fisher's *Capitalist Realism* is one of the more well-known works in contemporary political-economic philosophy, and rightly so. Fisher's adroit blending of film, music, and other aspects of 'pop culture' into his analysis makes for a fascinating read. More importantly, his analysis of 'Capitalist Realism,' his observation that it is 'easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism,' is a vastly important one for understanding the seemingly-never-ending predicament we are in. What's more, Fisher's contention that the mental health crisis and ecological crises represent the two forces most likely to 'break through' Capitalist Realism and send people on a genuine search for an alternative is, in our view, crucial for those, now and decades from now, looking for ways of making the necessary step in linking the social and ecological crises in their search for an alternative.

8. **Suzanne Collins**, *The Hunger Games*. It is possible that some readers of *Econ Journal Watch* look down their noses at the likes of the incredibly popular, 'young adults' *Hunger Games* trilogy. If so, that is a serious error. These books are a profound, startling wake-up call—a warning of a possible human future, of extreme inequality in a post-climate-ravaged world: of the most vicious of bread and circuses. And, a tremendous tale of how such a future might be resisted. By 2050, readers will know what aspects of the trilogy were prophetic—and what were, perhaps, a successful raising of the alarm. (It is worth reading Collins's books against the background of René Girard's similarly salient Violence and the Sacred, which is the most brilliant analysis we have of the dynamics of the kind of scapegoating mechanism that is the central topic of *The Hunger Games*, and could well rear its ugly head much more than it has already done in the hard times which lie before us.)

9. **Iain McGilchrist**, *The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World*. This weighty tome by the polymathic McGilchrist is an absolutely vital read for anyone wanting to understand the biases of the academic world, the real meaning of the Industrial Revolution, or the vast intellectual obstacles which stand in the way of our transforming our society into something less ecocidal. It draws richly on philosophy (offering a novel take on Wittgenstein and Heidegger, among others), literature (Wordsworth is a hero of the work), and history (across a jaw-dropping sweep of millennia) as well as neurology to account brilliantly for

our predicament. It is one of few nonfiction works of our time that we are confident will endure for generations.

10. **Tyson Yunkaporta**, *Sand Talk: How Indigenous Thinking Can Save the World*. Yunkaporta is an aboriginal intellectual and practitioner with a (literally) wildly provocative take on our world. Coming, in effect, from outside the dominant (terminal) global civilisation, he can see clearly things that most of us can, at best, barely bear to contemplate. If our civilisation is to transform into something viable within the next 20–30 years—if it is to be more butterfly (or maybe, phoenix) than dodo—it will be because it has learnt from the likes of this book. (If such wise transformation does not occur, then a vengeful Gaia will likely force it upon us by way of collapse; in which case, it is likely that anyone reading any of these books by mid-century will be doing so by candlelight—at best.)

Part Four: On the Climate and Ecological Crises and Extinction Rebellion

25. A case for genuine hope in the face of climate disaster [2018]

Bennet Francis and Rupert Read offer a critique of John Foster's work surrounding the climate crisis and Enlightenment values of rationality and progress, suggesting that Foster's critique goes one step too far in its call for a wholesale revaluation of our values – rationality remains a meaningful tool in the precautionary managing of the climate and ecological crises. This article first appeared in *The London Economic*.

It's time we faced up to reality: humanity is almost certainly going to have to learn to live in a world that has been radically damaged and transformed by human-triggered climate change. We are – virtually all of us, either softly or (less often) explicitly – in climate denial. The greenhouse gases we have polluted the atmosphere with have already set us down a path of serious and possibly irreversible environmental disruption, and the prospect of technocratic rescue is as unlikely as it is worrying on its own terms.

It is understandable that we tend to shy away from this realisation: from facing this reality. It is – or at least, it can feel – paralysing. Considering the notion that we face a disaster on a scale incomparable to any that the human race has faced thus far is like staring directly into the sun: so painful that we avoid it automatically, without conscious thought.

The reaction is indeed understandable; yet it is also, fundamentally, an act of intellectual and moral cowardice. But how exactly ought we to confront the problem authentically? We are entering uncharted territory here, and coming up with an answer to this question requires serious work. Intellectual work, and work on one's own resistance to even looking at what needs to be looked at here.

We've lost control

John Foster has made an important contribution to the task in hand through his critique (in a series of books and articles, including his recent After Sustainability) of the idea of "sustainable development". This concept, he points out, has become inherently myopic and self-serving. It allows us to preserve the illusion that we are in control and that we are doing the right thing. In truth, however, we are now in the position of a sorcerer unable to contain the powers of the nether world unleashed by his spells.

For Foster, what makes this conclusion so earth-shattering is the thought that our ruin has been precipitated not by our failure or our corruption, but by the very values we hold most dear: our Enlightenment faith in 'progress', the scientific 'mastery' of nature, the goal of improving material

conditions for all. It is in this sense that the climate disaster is to be regarded as a tragedy in the strictest sense of Greek drama: it is a tragic flaw at the very core of our identity that has sealed our fate. (For more on this, see Foster's recent Green House report).

A step too far?

Foster's conclusion is that we must 'look into tragedy', and adopt a more 'detached', 'ironic' stance towards our own values, making ourselves open to the Nietzschean view that our values might be 'revalued': transformed and recalibrated through our own action.

We should, however, be cautious about projecting this conclusion further, for doing so would be a step too far.

For: It is only by the lights of our present values that our predicament can properly be called catastrophe. There is a danger in appearing too eager to prophecy an evaluative bonfire of the vanities: if we do not care about the climate crisis because of its effect upon human beings, the natural world, and the valuable relationships between them, then why should we care about it at all?

Though Foster is right to point to a loss of control as an essential feature of the condition to which we have consigned ourselves, this does not entail that our situation is utterly hopeless by normal standards. Perhaps we cannot *know* just how bad things are, but this does not make it rational to assume our doom is inevitable, or irrational to attempt a political response. Allowing ourselves to be overcome by metaphysical vertigo could be just as self-serving as the sustainability paradigm Foster so perceptively debunks. So long as we do not know what the future holds, the logic of the Precautionary Principle continues to hold: we should seek out a route, even if finding one is a really long shot, toward avoiding any kind of catastrophe. We are now committed to climate disasters. But we do not yet know whether we are committed to climate catastrophe. So let's both hope and seek to avoid it.

'A reversion to improvised, collaborative, cooperative and local society'

To give our search for hope firmer grounding, it is helpful to turn to the literature on 'Disaster Studies', in particular Rebecca Solnit's amazing book *A Paradise Built in Hell*. Solnit observes that disasters, perversely, are often recalled by their survivors as periods of great joy and profoundly meaningful experience.

She argues that this is because, at these moments, the social order is revealed to be 'something akin to… artificial light: another kind of power that fails in disaster'. Its failure unshackles moral resources we had available to us all along – within ourselves, and in community waiting to spring into being – allowing 'a reversion to improvised, collaborative, cooperative and local society'. Moments of crisis allow us to see and to start to *make*, for the first time, a vision of a world we always sensed was possible, but had been unable to articulate.

Catastrophe is not a benefit

Foster is right to point out that any silver linings we see in the clouds of climate disaster should not be viewed as a form of *compensation*, to be factored into a cost-benefit analysis. No matter how much communities were uplifted by wartime spirit during the London Blitz, Londoners have no reason to thank the Luftwaffe for their bombs.

Tales of humanity united by mutual adversity can help us to find purpose in the face of potentially crushing despair, but they do not *mitigate* the crisis we face. They are to be brought into our account only on the other side of the looking glass, when the climate crisis has forced us to undergo an evaluative shift, to see our place in the world in something of a new light. They are thus incommensurable with benefits we might consider prior to such a value-shift, and therefore not amenable to consideration within the paradigm of rational choice theory.

Their function, as we have said, is to give us hope: hope that, while the importance of radically critiquing the legacy of the Enlightenment should not be understated (on which, watch this), our system of values, taken as a whole, is not so utterly bankrupt that it cannot be rehabilitated in the construction of a way forward. Hope that is palpable, concrete and practical, as well as philosophical.*

A way out of the abyss

Reflecting on the spirit of cooperation that has been shown to arise out of disaster provides us, as Solnit writes, with 'a glimpse of who else we ourselves may be and what else our society could become'. This throws us a lifeline in Foster's evaluative abyss. It gives us, in other words, a bridge between our present system of values and the system of values we can and hopefully will in future embrace. With such a path laid out for us, we can keep going, clear-eyed but hopeful, even in the face of the incredibly-threatening reality of climate-damage now looming over us.

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*One of us (Read) recently discussed this question in person with Solnit, and Solnit agreed: that there is a chance that the coming flush of climate disasters may not only feed a renewed spirit of community but wake humanity up to what we are doing to ourselves. Perhaps this coming slew of disasters might even yet be the making of us…

26. The Amazon burns: will the world learn? [2019]

Molly Scott-Cato (ex-MEP) and Rupert Read discuss the importance of the Amazon in the fight against climate change, as well as the plight of indigenous people, amidst the EU-Mercosur trade deal (still unratified in 2021). This article first appeared in *Green World*.

The Amazon rainforest is burning. Brazil has had more than 72,000 fire outbreaks so far this year, an 84 per cent increase on the same period in 2018, according to the country's National Institute for Space Research.

Why is this happening? It is happening because people are systematically setting fires in the forest. This unimaginable, absurd, ecocidal action is probably the crime of the century so far. It could be terminal for human civilisation.

It is happening also because of corporate greed. Major corporations from the global North are deeply implicated in the destruction.

Around a fifth of the Amazon rainforest has already been destroyed and scientists warn that losing another fifth could trigger a 'feedback loop', which could see the forest begin to dry out, burn and collapse. As the world's largest land-based carbon sink this could lead to runaway climate change and the end of life on earth as we know it.

This is not an exaggeration. The stakes couldn't be higher. The burning of the Amazon places the planet on red alert. To repeat, the Amazon is a globally significant ecosystem and carbon sink, vital in the fight against climate breakdown and the extinction crisis. If we lose it, our planet and civilization faces meltdown. The Brazilian President, Jair Bolsonaro, is encouraging this torching of the forest to appease his agricultural paymasters so they can use the land for beef, cattle and soya. He is guilty of ecocide and politicians across the globe must stand up to this environmental criminal.

Bolsonaro is destroying the entire future of Earth in real time. We should be willing to think of truly radical remedies. We must be really big, brave and fast, or it's game over. This is worse even than anything Trump's done.

Since the 1970s, nearly 800,000 square kilometres (km²) – an area equivalent to that of Turkey, and bigger than that of Texas – of Brazil's original four million km² (1.5 million square miles) of Amazon forest has been lost to logging, farming, mining, roads, dams and other forms of development. Deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon has increased by 67 per cent since President Jair Bolsonaro came into power.

What, concretely, is to be done? Molly Scott Cato is urging her fellow MEPs in the European Parliament to block a trade agreement between the EU and Mercosur – an economic bloc comprising Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay and Venezuela. The EU-Mercosur agreement – the largest in Europe's history, according to officials – would make it cheaper for Brazilian farmers to export

agricultural products, particularly beef, despite growing evidence that cattle ranching is the primary driver of deforestation.

The EU has already agreed the deal in principle, but it still needs to be ratified by MEPs. Brazil is drastically failing to meet its obligations under the Paris Agreement or protect the rights of indigenous forest communities. These are sufficient grounds for MEPs to block Mercosur. Close to the numbers needed are willing to vote to stop this trade agreement, a move that will send a powerful message to the Bolsonaro regime.

The Mercosur agreement hangs on a knife-edge. Please lobby your MEPs now to urge them to reject it. Please also sign the petition calling on the European Commission to scrap the planned Mercosur agreement for the benefit of the people and environment on both sides of the Atlantic.

Intensifying agriculture harms indigenous people. A new report by Alex Thomson for Channel 4 News, aired in June, revealed the extent of the destruction due to illegal logging and cattle ranchers. He reported that 'Bolsonaro wants the Amazon rainforest destroyed and said Brazil should wipe out indigenous tribes'. He also reports that the president 'wants to give every rancher a gun'.

Now this situation is suddenly far worse. Indigenous peoples, the guardians of the rainforest, are literally having their homes burnt out.

The UK Government must take action. The burning of the Amazon rainforest and the desolation of its inhabitants is now a planetary emergency. This is a real test for the government. If it is serious about anthropogenic dangerous climate change it will work with EU partners to impose sanctions on Brazil until there are guarantees from the Bolsonaro government that it will act to stop this destruction. Shamefully, as of now the government is not even offering any real criticism of the devastation of the world's lungs.

'Consumers' too can take action. We can all play our part in this unfolding calamity. We should boycott Brazilian produce, especially beef and soya, which is responsible for much of the rainforest destruction.

Although the Amazon is part of Brazilian territory, it is of global importance. Bolsonaro's nationalist claims that attempts to preserve the rainforest by European is neo-colonialist are Trumpist excuses for omplicity, but we must respect and uphold the extraordinarui8nkmk undertaken by indigenous Amazonians in defending their forest, for which many have sacrificed their lives. We must work with and respectfully support the work of organisations like Guardians of the Forest, and NGO of forest dwellers defending their land and their homes across the world.

We are angry. We are scared. We are in grief. If you are too, then please join us now, in seeking to act.

27. Climate Letter: Climate Models and Precautionary Measures [2015]

A letter penned by Joseph Norman, Yaneer Bar-Yam, Nassim Nicholas Taleb, and Rupert Read, which succinctly outlines the ridiculous of any approach beyond the precautionary when dealing with our planet's entire climatic system – and as the authors note, our *only planet*, at that. This article first appeared in *Issues in Science and Technology*.

THE POLICY DEBATE with respect to anthropogenic climate-change typically revolves around the accuracy of models. Those who contend that models make accurate predictions argue for specific policies to stem the foreseen damaging effects; those who doubt their accuracy cite a lack of reliable evidence of harm to warrant policy action.

These two alternatives are not exhaustive. One can sidestep the "skepticism" of those who question existing climate-models, by framing risk in the most straightforward possible terms, at the global scale. That is, we should ask "what would the correct policy be if we had no reliable models?"

We have *only one* planet. This fact radically constrains the kinds of risks that are appropriate to take at a large scale. Even a risk with a very low probability becomes unacceptable when it affects all of us – there is no reversing mistakes of that magnitude. Without any precise models, we can still reason that polluting or altering our environment significantly could put us in uncharted territory, with no statistical trackrecord and potentially large consequences. It is at the core of both scientific decision making and ancestral wisdom to take seriously absence of evidence when the consequences of an action can be large. And it is standard textbook decision theory that a policy should depend at least as much on uncertainty concerning the adverse consequences as it does on the known effects.

Further, it has been shown that in any system fraught with opacity, harm is in the dose rather than in the nature of the offending substance: it increases nonlinearly to the quantities at stake. Everything fragile has such property. While some amount of pollution is inevitable, high quantities of any pollutant put us at a rapidly increasing risk of destabilizing the climate, a system that is integral to the biosphere. Ergo, we should build down CO2 emissions, even regardless of what climate-models tell us.

This leads to the following asymmetry in climate policy. The scale of the effect must be demonstrated to be large enough to have impact. Once this is shown, and it has been, the burden of proof of absence of harm is on those who would deny it.

It is the degree of opacity and uncertainty in a system, as well as asymmetry in effect, rather than specific model predictions, that should drive the precautionary measures. Push a complex system too far and it will not come back. The popular belief that uncertainty undermines the case for taking seriously the 'climate crisis' that scientists tell us we face is the opposite of the truth. Properly understood, as driving the case for precaution, uncertainty radically underscores that case, and may even constitute it.

28. An Epistolary Dialogue on *Avatar* [previously unpublished, 2014]

Rupert Read: 'This is an exchange of letters I undertook with my colleague Peter Kramer, in the Autumn of 2014. The context for it is our idea of 'The Avatar Project' – i.e. of being ready to capitalise on the sequels to *Avatar*, to help effect cultural-political change… But the project has yet to come to fruition - because the sequels have endlessly been delayed! However, it still could. Any reader wanting to be ready to help make the project happen when the first sequel finally nears should get in touch with us.'

9 August 2014

Dear Peter,

You asked me when we met recently (at the aptly-chosen 'Garden House' pub in Norwich) what my own response to watching *Avatar* was. Well, I think that it wasn't quite as life-changing for me as it evidently was for some people, judging by the "#Avatar" hashtag twitterfeed (more on which, below)... In a certain obvious sense, I was not the top target audience for the film: the target audience were those who started from something like the position of Jake. Whereas I already started from something like the position of Grace. But the film did make a very very powerful impression on me.

I went to see it genuinely excited and intrigued, but also ready to be disappointed, because I didn't think that a mainstream mega-budget Hollywood super-movie by James Cameron could possibly live up to the hype. I came out entirely undisappointed. *Thrilled*, in fact. Because for the first time, a film had been made in 3-D that actually made sense of the medium of 3-D. But far far more importantly, because the film instantly spoke to me about the dire need for Earthlings to awaken to the ecological crisis, and to act.

The impression only deepened during subsequent days. I kept coming back to the wonder of the film: to its transformative mythic-and-yet-original 'hero's journey', to the *world* entire that it created, to its beauty so evocative of the beauty of our own threatened world, to its remarkable radicalism (its 'anti-Americanism', its ecologism, its stress on the need to learn from indigenous people and even to rebecome them), and to the simple wonder/splendour of its commercial success: the way it was evidently working its wonders on so many viewers worldwide.

I started to think that the film was going to mark a transformative moment in world culture. That it was actually going 'to change the world' more - perhaps much much more than any film had ever done before. I found I wasn't alone in such thoughts and feelings, which strengthened them further: I spoke to colleagues where we work, at the University of East Anglia, who were equally thrilled by it, and in some cases equally convinced that it was going to change the world; I watched the negative and uncomprehending reviews flood in from the knowing and the cynical and the 'right-on' (including for instance Slavoj Zizek: who hadn't actually deigned to *watch* the film…), which only confirmed for me the existential threat to existing failing paradigms (including on the Left) that the film was offering; I watched the box office receipts flood in until it became the biggest grossing film of all time, confirming for me that the people were wiser than the elite of 'experts'; I noticed with great excitement the evident

fear of the authoritarian government in China (who banned the film while being so afraid of its power that they had to pretend that they weren't banning it) that the film would be instrumental in bringing about exactly what it called for (i.e. indigenous inhabitants throwing rapacious miners and other expropriators off their land); I saw the similar sense of threat felt on the part of the conservative Right in the U.S., who moved explicitly to denounce the film; I started watching the #Avatar twitterfeed and becoming impressed by the number of ordinary people who were seemingly being moved to change concrete aspects of their high-footprint/militaristic/etc lives/culture, through the film; I found more and more activists who I knew personally and who were scattered around the world - activists standing up to the juggernaut of industrialism and imperialism - who felt the film speaking directly to them, and who in some cases started explicitly invoking the Na'vi in their protests...

I wish that all this had continued, and mushroomed, and had become fully what I hoped it would. Why it did not, and how it might yet in the future, I'd love to discuss with you... I feel strongly that *Avatar* offers us still the tools with which to return to something more like the garden, if we are only ready to listen to it and to pick them up and to complete the film, through a real-life sequel...

Faithfully,

Rupert.

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10 August 2014

Dear Rupert,

Thanks for reminding me of why we embarked on our conversations about *Avatar* in the first place. By way of a response, I want to sketch my somewhat different, but ultimately comparable, reaction to the film.

It is hard to believe but I had barely noticed the hype preceding and surrounding the film's release in December 2009. Unlike you, I tend to keep what is going on in the world at arm's length, only listening to the occasional radio news and perhaps reading a weekly news magazine (I admit, it is *The Economist*, not an obvious choice in the circles we tend to move in), but not much else. I tend to engage with developments once they have stopped being 'news' by reading books (hence I am always a year or two behind). Although, as you know, I am willing to learn through conversations as well; indeed, I'd rather have a friend bring me up-to-date than for example read a website. In any case, I had no particular expectations when I went to the cinema to watch *Avatar*.

On reflection, this is rather odd, because, as an academic, I had had a considerable investment in the films of James Cameron. I had published two scholarly essays on *Titanic* and had examined the overall shape of his career but then I seem to have lost interest for a while (I just couldn't get into all his underwater documentaries and found that reports about the new fiction projects he was allegedly working on tended to be unreliable). But once I sat down to watch the film in 3-D (a format I had previously experienced only very rarely and without it making much of an impression), a lot fell into

place. Now, I have to say that while I like to be *moved* by a film's story, getting inside its characters, situations and actions, I also get a thrill out of a more detached analysis of its form and themes and its place in our culture.

So let's take a look at some of my observations, responses and ideas from around the time that I first saw the film in December 2009. Several of them turned out to be misleading, others came to be the foundation of the project that the two of us have embarked upon. Here goes: there is a lot of *Titanic* in *Avatar*, but at first I couldn't imagine that it would be anywhere near as big a hit; 3-D and computer-generated imagery make a real difference here, helping us to immerse ourselves in an alternative world, both 'natural' and 'technological'; the film feels like an attack on an American-identified military-industrial complex and its ending like a call to action, but I wasn't sure about how I felt about becoming a kind of eco-warrior; how appropriate that this call to action was uttered at the very moment that the world's political leaders had failed to come up with any kind of productive agreement at the UN conference on climate change in Copenhagen; there are so many echoes of *2001: A Space Odyssey* in *Avatar*, and *2001* was a film that (as I knew from writing a book about it) had come closer than most to really make a difference in many people's lives (including my own) – but *Avatar*, I thought, simply wasn't as good (later I decided that 'goodness' comes in many different shapes and such straightforward comparisons may not be very productive).

A lot of this was quite exciting for me, but none of it was particularly transformative – but then the film turned out to be hugely successful in cinemas around the world, probably more successful than any previous film in history (although as you know, Rupert, this is not in fact as easy to establish to be a matter of fact as one might think). As you know, the primary focus of my work has long been on the biggest movie hits, and once *Avatar*'s enormous success became obvious, it *really* got my attention. And I wasn't surprised at all when I found that the film became ever more interesting and indeed engaging, the more I found out about its long production history and its international reception, the more I re-watched it and the more carefully I examined it, the more I wrote about it and the more I discussed it with others. Soon enough I came to a conclusion which is not that different from yours: As far as I can see, the release of *Avatar* is the single most important global cultural event of the 21st century so far – and there is something incredibly hopeful about its story and its success.

This response already goes beyond the word limit we gave ourselves (sorry about that). So there is no space left to respond in more detail to your message. But I am sure we can pick up on key points in later exchanges.

Faithfully,

Peter

11 August 2014

Dear Peter,

Thanks for your letter; I really enjoyed the honesty of your account.

Yes, the similarities between *2001* and *Avatar* are indeed striking. For me, the most telling similarity of all is to be found in the final shot: The 'Star-Child' is a reborn form of the film's protagonist, Bowman. It/he turns and faces the 'fourth wall': it faces directly into the camera. It faces the audience. It faces YOU, the viewer, in a direct departure from cinematic convention, a gesture of provocation, the most inviting of Brechtian 'alienation effects'. It challenges you to absorb the 'lessons' of the film (whatever exactly they are: some of them are beautifully explored in your book on *2001*, Peter), and perhaps to undergo personally a rebirthing transformation that is somehow of a similar nature to that that the protagonist has undergone. That is the very final moment of the film.

I've written in detail about the final shot of *Avatar* towards the close of my article here http://www.radicalanthropologygroup.org/old/journal_04.pdf. Briefly: The Na'vi avatar of Jake, the film's protagonist, is in this final moment of the film Jake's reborn form. Jake has been reborn (it's his "birthday", he tells us) in this body. His eyes open and face directly into the camera, facing the audience: facing YOU, the viewer. This gaze challenges you absolutely directly, I believe, to absorb the 'lessons' of the film (lessons that are a little easier to comprehend than those of *2001* – but absolutely no less challenging). It challenges you, roughly, to be reborn as an intelligent eco-warrior: not one who will throw her life away as Neytiri almost did in despair as the battle turned against them, a little earlier, but one who will actually rise to the challenge of somehow – by the very various means no doubt necessary -- stopping the machine *before* it reaches the point of killing our mother… Again, the shot which starts to impress this on us is the very final moment of the film.

There is almost a passing of life or of the torch, in these two moments: I mean, among other things, that one actually feels somehow directly communicated with by the being in question, who is alive to one at this point. One feels and can pick up the life-force that is flooding the Bowman-Star-Child, or Jake-reborn. One is energised by it in the way one can be by a guru, a lover, or a charismatic political leader. Or by meeting an animal in nature.

(My [scare-quoted] use of the word "lessons" by the way is deliberate: both films are explicitly about the importance of learning and the difficulty and risks and splendour of the transmission of knowledge, considered as something radically other than the taking of information and the placing of it in another's head. Both films are troubled by and seek to point ways way beyond what Paulo Freire in his masterwork *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* famously calls "the banking model of education".)

In thinking about the *differences* between the two films' endings, I'm struck by the fact that in *2001* the Star-Child has come back to Earth, presumably to share the mind-blowing knowledge it has acquired. This follows the classic circular form of the 'hero's journey' as described for instance by Christopher Vogler: a beginning in the ordinary world, a voyage out to the special world, and a return to the ordinary world, with a gift for the people, an 'elixir'. Whereas in *Avatar* the future-Earth has been given up on: it

is the defeated Earthlings who are sent back there, and the hero and his allies remain in the special world. In this connection, I note the following remark of Vogler's, on p. 36 of his classic *The Writer's Journey*: "Group-oriented Heroes often face a choice between returning to the Ordinary World of the first act, or remaining in the Special World of the second act. Heroes who choose to remain in the Special World are rare in Western culture *but fairly common in classic Asian and Indian tales*" (the italics are mine). Here, we might recall that a key origin of the term "avatar" is in Hinduism, which abounds in divine avatars on Earth, and that Hinduism and other Eastern philosophies are clearly sources for *Avatar*'s panentheism: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jay-michaelson/the-meaning-of-avatar-eve_b_400912.html.

But any hero's journey that ends with the hero and his/her associates staying in the special world risks of course merely being a descent into escapism, a remaining stuck in a dream (and some of *Avatar's* viewers do seem to have got stuck at/in this point). One of the ways in which *Avatar* avoids such a fate is precisely through its final shot… The baton is passed to you, the viewer: It is *you* who must return with/realise the elixir. That *Avatar* is set in the future underscores that you have to bring the lessons you have learnt back into the present, to seek to ensure that the future of Earth is not as depicted/backstoried in the film. Not you alone, of course: Together, we have to seek to save the paradises of our world and to turn it back into something more like the Edenic world of Pandora. We have somehow to find and act on the shared *hope* for a better future that will be necessary to enable us somehow to put strip-mining, destruction of indigenous knowledge, the military-industrial complex etc. back into the box.

As Jake himself put it, in the very first lines of the film: "When I was lying in the V.A. hospital with a big hole blown through the middle of my life, I started having these dreams of flying. I was free. But sooner or later, you always have to wake up." By the end of the film, or after it, we are at last *waking up*… Emerging from the shared dream of anaesthetised contentment, into what needs to happen – what we need to do – to save the future…

Faithfully,

Rupert.

12 August 2014

Dear Rupert,

While reading your last letter (I would like to call it "letter" rather than using the perhaps more appropriate term "message"; I am old-fashioned that way), I got very excited about your precise and evocative observations about the endings of *Avatar* and *2001*, which bring much of what we have recently dealt with in our off-line conversations into sharp focus. And I immediately had a million things I wanted to write in response. But then I thought that perhaps we are getting ahead of ourselves a little bit in our correspondence. After all, we are in it for the long haul; we have weeks, months, indeed years

to explore *Avatar* and its ramifications. So perhaps it is appropriate for me to slow things down a little bit.

You will remember that at some point we were looking for possible titles for our *Avatar* project, and we came up with "How *Avatar* Can Change Your Life" – and then fairly quickly revised this so as to get "How *Avatar* Can Change Our Lives". The project is not about the two of us being in the know and the other participants (initially readers, then hopefully also contributors) learning from us, so that each one of them can, individually, make changes in his or her life based on our teachings. If this project works at all, it will do so because the two of us and all the others are working together to make changes, bringing different perspectives and kinds of expertise to the table; and because our orientation is always towards each other, rather than on our isolated, individual existence. The project's title should reflect this, hence "Our Lives" rather than "Your Life".

How, then, does this affect the way we talk about *Avatar*? At the beginning of your last letter, you write that at the end of *2001*, the Star-Child "faces YOU, the viewer", and you continue to use the second person pronoun in the remainder of the text. Should we not try to include ourselves in the group of people that is being addressed here? This would mean to write: "faces US, the viewers". After all, the two films we are discussing challenge you and me as much as any other viewer. So I think it might be useful not to use language which suggests that the two of us are somehow set apart from the film's general audience – or indeed from the readers of our letters. What do you think?

I should add that occasionally you write "we" instead of "you"; so we already are in at least partial agreement. And in any case, in a bracketed paragraph you are reflecting on what it might mean for anyone to learn a "lesson". Perhaps you could say more about this. In addition, we should perhaps take a closer look at how *Avatar* depicts learning processes (and once we have done this, we might want to go back to *2001* which employs radically different strategies to deal with this issue).

Over to you.

Faithfully,

Peter.

12 August 2014

Dear Peter;

Great point!

I spoke about "You" partly because it is likely that the way one initially receives such a communication - a gaze - as one receives at the close of these two great films, is: as oneself, as an individual. But basically, I completely agree with you: It is *essential* to what these films are seeking to do, and <u>especially</u> *Avatar*, that the learning and transformation process is not just individual, but collective. A group-mind, if you

will (think of the trees on Pandora…), a group-will. And this is partly why I quoted that super passage from Vogler that I did, which opens with him speaking explicitly of "*group-oriented* heroes…".

I'd love to hear your thoughts sometime, Peter, about what is 'taught' in/by *2001* (in/by the monolith, the black rectangle…). As for *Avatar*: The 'lesson' learnt by the protagonist in *Avatar* at the hands of Neytiri et al is actually, I would say: how to radically transform one's life. How to find a new, *viable* way of being. That actually involves living (lightly) on the Earth. How to (really) see and feel in a whole new way, including feeling into things (this, not coincidentally, is the historical/etymological root of our term "empathy"). This of course isn't something that can be taught as propositional knowledge. It can't be written in a book (or: whatever is written in a book about it is only a finger pointing, not the Moon it is pointing at). And again: it has to be learnt *in community* (think of initiation rituals, e.g. in *Avatar*).

And here we circle back to the question implicit at the end of my very first letter (yes: these definitely feel like *letters* to me, not like *messages*), above: Why didn't *Avatar* have an even bigger impact on the world? Why didn't it start to radically transform our society? Because a key part of what I would hazard as the answer is this: That there was virtually nothing by way of a *vehicle* available that could help to transform the *individual* transformations that were occurring (e.g. as I watched the hashtag "#Avatar" twitterfeed, I saw one person swearing to get rid of their 4x4, another resolving not to join the U.S. military, and so on) into something *communal*. Yes, people of course mostly saw the film together, in cinemas; and yes, more excitingly, there were some campaigns that started to use (to dress as, etc.) the Na'vi as a way of dramatising the plight of oppressed and indigenous peoples; …but there was precious little bringing of this together, and even less effort to use people's presence together at the cinema (nor even online, with a very few exceptions) to start to mold a transformational possibility or identity out of the experience… (Plus, from the start there was the 'knowing' cynical rejectionism of the film by many 'authoritative' and 'progressive' voices, that served to dampen any such possibility.)

Here is a thought. What if there had been *teach-ins* around the film, and/or Q-and-As following many showings? What if there had been efforts by the film-makers to enlist indigenous peoples and land-grab-resisters to speak out publicly alongside them about it? What if people had systematically leafleted showings, urging those leaving the cinema to take apposite action on the basis of what they had just seen? What if the online 'communities' that started to form, of enthusiasts for the film, had sought or been helped (with seed-money) to shape debates such as we are having here, or more directly-engaged activisty debates?

And here is an idea... What if we see if there are people out there in the world who, like me, rue the missed opportunity, and would much prefer it not to be missed again? In other words: What if we participated in a process of actually doing the things (or at least some of them) mentioned in my previous paragraph, for *Avatar*, and (perhaps more importantly, in terms of the huge opportunity that will be presented) *for its sequel*?

Faithfully,

Rupert.

18 August 2014

Dear Rupert,

I can't remember what kind of response I expected to get when finishing my last letter - perhaps elaborate comments on the film's story and on your philosophy of teaching and learning -, but I certainly didn't expect this: a clear and passionate vision of what our project will hopefully amount to, including some details of a future plan of action. Yes, we have touched on this before in our off-line conversations, but to see it in writing somehow makes it so much more *real*. I do need to remind myself that our project is not only talk, but will encompass various forms of action at some point. Being a political activist, this is nothing new for you, but it is for me.

Before we get this far, though, perhaps we need to learn more about the kinds of (on- as well as off-line) activities *Avatar* fans, or activists referencing *Avatar* in their work, *did* get involved in. Both of us have read a few things here and there, but it would be useful at some point to get a more detailed account of what people have already done with *Avatar* so as to learn from their experiences and perhaps to build directly on their previous actions and on the networks they have established (if those still exist; if not, one might be able to revive them). More generally, of course, we could probably also learn a lot from the work that Henry Jenkins and his colleagues have done over the last few years on the relationship between popular culture and political activism, between 'participatory culture' and 'participatory politics'. Once we have done more research and reading on all of this, we can go into much more detail in our correspondence about what kind of activities we want to initiate, what kind of activities other *Avatar* fans may want to get involved in (or indeed initiate themselves).

Here is another thought: Whatever momentum we will get going should indeed reach a point of great intensity in the weeks immediately preceding and following the release of the first *Avatar* sequel; but how will we be able to link our activities to the actual story, and the 'lessons', of that sequel? How much can we find out about the first sequel before its release? How can we build on our engagment with the first film, and yet be open to whatever the sequel has to offer? It is entirely possible that it will move into an unforeseen direction, even contradict what we find so moving and productive about the first film. Of course, that in itself can become a rallying point for us and other fans, the point of departure for a passionate debate. But I don't think that this is what you have in mind. It would be so much easier if the sequel would do more of the kind of work that (in our understanding) the first film has been doing, so that whatever momentum we build up from our engagement with the first film can unproblematically be sustained by the second (and the third and the fourth). But there is absolutly no guarantee that this will happen. So where does this leave us?

Well, let's go back, for the time being, to the films we have been discussing. You asked about the lessons of *2001* (and how the content of these lessons, and the way in which they are presented, might compare to what is happening in *Avatar*). I have written extensively on this in my book on *2001* and in a contribution to the ThinkingFilmCollective blogspot (http://thinkingfilmcollective.blogspot.co.uk/2013/11/an-introduction-to-2001-space-odyssey.html). Let me just pick out a couple of points here: The 'group-oriented heroes' at the centre of the first part of the

film consist of the band of pre-human hominids around the one usually referred to as 'Moonwatcher' (a designation taken from the novel, but never used in the film). What the alien monolith teaches them is how to use bones as weapons with which to kill animals that they then can eat (the hominids appear to have been herbivorous before), and to kill other hominids with whom they compete for scarce resources, here exemplified by a waterhole (previous encounters between rival bands involved aggressive posturing but no actual violence). The film implies that it is precisely the use of weapons that eventually transforms pre-human hominids into modern humans. From this perspective humans appear to be, first and foremost, meat-eating murderers - and the use of a phallic bone, rather than for example a rock, also implies a lot about male particularities and male dominance in all this.

The film's final and definitive 'lesson' which the astronaut David Bowman is being taught once again through the appearance of a monolith, needs to be seen against the backdrop of the earlier transformation that gave rise to modern humanity: He ages rapidly and is reborn as a 'Star-Child', a foetus that, as far as it is possible to determine, has no sexual characteristics, nor any need for weapons or indeed for food. But perhaps the Star-Child does have a need for company, because it returns to the vicinity of the planet Earth, floating above it before turning towards the camera in the final frames of the film's action. The final scene is extraordinarily evocative, even more so when seen against the overall trajectory of the film.

What is more, the mechanism by which the monoliths achieve the transformation of those before them remains mysterious. Perhaps it is possible to understand what is happening to Moonwatcher: The first monolith somehow plants the seed for an idea in his mind (a seed closely linked to images of animals being killed) – he starts playing around with a bone and gradually realises its potential as a weapon. There is no comparable process, as far as we as viewers can see, in the final transformation of David Bowman. He arrives in a room apparently constructed by aliens, sees an older version of himself and then seems to become that older version. Once he lies on his deathbed, a monolith appears in front of him, and the next thing we see is a foetus floating above that bed.

I could say a bit more about this, but I have go on for too long already. Let me hand the analysis over to you again.

Faithfully,

Peter

25 August 2014

Dear Peter,

I could try saying more about *2001*... But you're the world expert on it! So I'll leave you the last word on it, for now.

Instead, I'd rather get back to our central topic, the film that has inherited *2001* as well as any other film has: *Avatar*.

I recently re-watched *Avatar* again. Wow. This is a film that keeps on giving. I saw so many new and rich things in it that I hadn't seen before. So much to get excited about it.

So: I thought maybe the best way to start this new round of discussion between you and me would be to work through some of those things I saw, just this time…

1) The very first thing you see in the film is seemingly his dream of flying. This dream, intriguingly is precisely what we see on the end-credits of the film. It involves someone flying above the forest and gradually *entering* (almost, becoming?) the forest. (It reminds me of Ursula LeGuin's magnificent novel *The Word for World is Forest*, an important 'predecessor text' for *Avatar*.)

2) It's obvious really, but one doesn't see it on a first watching of the film: in zero-gravity, Jake is barely disabled. At least: his disability is much less obvious. It is only when he gets back into a gravitational environment that his paraplegia strikes anyone. (The film might on this score be helpfully compared and contrasted with *Gravity* - as we [you and I] examine it here: <http://thinkingfilmcollective.blogspot.co.uk/2014/01/gravitys-pull.html>.)

3) The film is *constantly* concerned with rebirth. Very close to the start of the film, we have "One life ends: another begins". And very close to the end of the film, we have "It's my birthday, after all." This is beautiful architecture. Very similarly: The film is *constantly* concerned with dreaming (and waking up), and (connectedly) with (*really*) seeing. I think that the film in one way wants us to dream more, as I have argued in my piece on *Avatar* here: <http://www.radicalanthropologygroup.org/old/journal_04.pdf> . But, crucially, *not in an 'escapist' way*. We need to dream in the way that *Avatar* encourages one to dream (and compare again here *The Word for World is Forest*: see e.g. <http://www.depauw.edu/sfs/backissues/7/watson7art.htm>). *Not* in the way people are instructed to dream when they go and see a standard Hollywood piece of escapist fantasy. A lot of fiction is *mere* escapism.

4) To extend the argument that I made here <http://thinkingfilmcollective.blogspot.co.uk/2013/10/avatar-transformed-cinema.html> , *Avatar* is itself a metaphor for how one ought to experience cinema. Especially 3-D: You 'drop in' to the point of view in the movie. All your little bodily movements, and emotions, as you sit in your seat, allowing an experience, a 'real' experience. An experience that can profoundly matter…

5) I was very struck when I re-watched the film this time by the way that on our first view of Pandora, from space, it looks just like the Earth. The blue planet. The green planet.

6) The film also repeatedly brings us even closer to ourselves at the historical moment we are in. I love Jake's remark, "They can fix a spinal, if you got the money, but not on vet-benefits, *not in this economy*." Think *Avatar* and 'austerity'…

7) Then (still within the first several minutes of the film), we have Quaritch's marvellous opening speech: "You are not in Kansas any more". In other words: 'you'/we have come to the 'special world', a world like a dream world - a world which will kill you, like a real nightmare, if you do not learn how to be in it. This remark might also serve to bring women viewers in in a subtle way: for this remark is directed toward the listener with Dorothy from *The Wizard of Oz* as a proxy for them. Oz: the ultimate movie dreamworld prior to Pandora: Oz is literally a dream-world, a dreamscape replete with avatars of everyone significant who Dorothy knows from the real (Kansas) world…

8) I was struck on this viewing by the extent to which Jake initially views the avatars merely as pure prosthetics. Not as a body/personage which he could conceivably come to *be*. Like in Justin Leiber's superb philosophical novel *Beyond Rejection*, Jake's alienation from his new body has to be (and is) radically overcome.

9) I was struck also by Norm's remark to Jake as he does his first video-log, that "We've got to get into the habit of documenting everything, what we see, *what we feel*." "What we see": that will come to take on a different and fuller meaning ("I see you"). But "What we feel"? This is a remarkable thing to say. It signals clearly that feelings are integral to the process of viewing the film, of 'dropping into' the position of an avatar. It signals clearly a route beyond the scientism that at times superficially seems to infect the film. The film's 'scientists' are not just biologists; they are anthropologists, and potentially of the best kind: participatory anthropologists, even 'reverse' anthropologists, ready genuinely to learn from their 'subjects'. (I go into this thought in detail in "The Call of *Avatar*", in <http://www.radicalanthropologygroup.org/old/journal_04.pdf>). There is also of course an intriguing link/contrast here with Quaritch's injunction to "Learn these savages from the inside"…

10) The first time that Jake 'goes in', Grace remarks to him, "Let your mind go blank. It shouldn't be hard for you." The latter sentence is intended as humorous, of course, but with serious intent. But Grace is in this regard a victim of ideology: she is thinking of knowledge/information, in and of which indeed Jake is poor, but what she needs to be thinking about is orientation of mind, fundamental attitude. In that regard, Jake's mind is jam-packed-full: full of the same ideology that we all more or less share unless and until we manage to work our way out of it. Jake's mind in *this* sense is decidedly unblank: he needs to learn something like Zen. He needs, as Shunryu Suzuki famously remarks, to become a beginner. Rather than merely (as he is, as most of us Earthlings are, especially those of us in rich denatured societies) immature. "Like a baby". Unknowingly, Jake is stuffed-full of an ideology that prevents him from being able to do exactly what he needs to do: learn, in the true/deep sense of the word…

That's perhaps enough to start with. These ten points all emerge essentially from the first 20 minutes or so of the film, alone! Rich indeed.

Faithfully,

Rupert

10 September 2014

Dear Rupert,

It has taken me quite a long time to sit down and respond to your letter. Ironically, this has a lot to do with the fact that I have started to spend much more on our *Avatar* project. Unlike you I have not done so by re-watching the film and taking extensive notes, but by reading around it. More about this later. Right now, I want to comment on some of the points you made.

The opening of the film (which I just rewatched) is unusual. For one thing, there are no credits (which would usually follow the logo and fanfare of the film's distributor 20th Century Fox). It is as if the film was not made by anyone, but presented a story that tells itself (not coincidentally perhaps, the original *Star Wars* works in the same way). But then there is a male voice (which, we later learn, belongs to someone called Jake Sully), talking to us - is this voice the teller of the story we are going to see? The voice mentions a veterans' hospital and that, while lying in it, he dreamt of flying. We don't see the reality of the hospital, only the dream of flight. What is the particular significance of this dream here? One of the many associations we might have is rather ominous. The most famous (and notorious) US veterans of recent decades are those who fought the war in Vietnam, and some of the most impactful images of that war concern aerial attacks, especially on dense forests (think *Apocalypse Now* here - notably the attack accompanied by Wagner's "Ride of the Valkyries"; surely not coincidentally, we later find out that the landing ship in *Avatar*, which is also used in the attack on Na'vi strongholds in the jungle, is called *Valkyrie*). So the dream images of flight we see are not simply about personal freedom and the beauty of - and the flying person's immersion in - nature, they might also be memories (or premonitions) of aerial attacks.

Yet there is another element: Inbetween the Fox logo and the first images, the screen goes dark for ten seconds, and what we might loosely call 'tribal' music can be heard, which continues when the images and, with another ten second delay, Jake's voiceover start. The music hints at the presence of another culture in this story - is it meant as a counterpoint to Jake's perspective, or is it already somehow part of his dream?

It is not only the case that we don't see the veterans' hospital, we also don't find out for quite a while what Jake was in it for. Despite some very subtle clues, there is no explicit depiction of Jake's disability until he leaves the landing ship in his wheelchair (about five minutes into the film). In the flashback to the funeral of his brother and the conversation with company men asking him to take his brother's place, he is positioned curiously low in the frame, as if he was sitting down, rather than standing up like them. One of them also says, rather cryptically: "You could step into his [brother's] shoes, so to speak." But, upon first watching the film, I think it is impossible to deduce from all this that Jake is a paraplegic. Although Cameron had toyed with the idea of revealing the disability earlier (as can be seen in the extended versions of the film), he finally decided to delay this revelation as long as possible for the film's original release.

This delay is made possible by the fact that, apart from the flashback to his brother's funeral, Jake is first seen in his cryogenic pod in the spaceship and then moving around outside that pod in zero gravity.

Could we say that his weightless floating is a bit like flying (albeit in a wholly manmade, rather than a natural, environment)? Has one aspect of his dream already come true (at least temporarily)? Or is he perhaps still dreaming after all? In other words, when Jake wakes up from his dream (as he says one always must), he enters a dream-like reality - dream-like especially for us who live in a world where huge spaceships flying to another star system are still at the dream-stage. In many ways, then, Jake is not waking up properly at all; what follows is more like a variant of the dream he has been having.

Once we have seen the flashbacks showing his brother's funeral, there is also perhaps an uncomfortable link between the cryogenic pod Jake woke up in and his brother's coffin (at one point the camera is placed within the coffin just like it had been placed within the pod). Having seen this card-board coffin being shoved into an opening where it is to be incinerated, we may think back to the, by comparison very luxurious, coffin-like container in which Jake first opened his eyes, before he went outside to enter the dream-like sphere of a huge room dotted with floating human bodies. We could even go as far as saying that, from a certain perspective, this now looks much like a (techno-)caricature of heaven - this is where veterans (and also perhaps scientists like Jake's brother) go when they die.

I have talked with experts on scriptwriting about *Avatar*'s opening, and they seemed to agree that it is rather heavy-handed and confusing; in other words, it is inept by the standards of Hollywood storytelling, and it shouldn't really work. (Not coincidentally, one might say the very same thing about the opening of *Star Wars*.) There is too much exposition (background information we need to understand the story that we are going to follow) crammed into too short a period of time - and at the same time, a lot of obviously pertinent information (for example, why Jake was in the hospital and, more generally, what the Earth of the future looks like) is missing. Also, the opening is both multi-layered (there are the tribal music, the voice-over, the dream scene, the scenes in the spaceship, the flashbacks) and non-linear (going back and forth in time), which is a recipe for total confusion. And yet by and large it seems to have engaged audiences. Perhaps what this opening does is to give us a heavy dose of very divergent snippets of experience (dreaming, confronting the loss of a family member, a job offer, a long journey, weightlessness) which are ultimately very disorienting - so as to align our outlook with the disorientation Jake has experienced ever since he got injured (which he describes as having "a big hole blown through the middle of my life"), and which he continues to experience now that he is approaching Pandora.

I have already gone a little bit beyond our 1,000 word limit - and I haven't even touched on most of your ten points. There is so much to say.

Faithfully,

Peter

15 September 2014

Dear Peter,

Thanks for your fascinating letter! I agree with the vast majority of your analysis, which I see conjoining with mine, of the opening sequences of the film. On a couple of particular points:

Yes, it is absolutely clear that the helicopters in *Avatar* are the inheritors of the mantle of those in *Apocalypse Now*. (The two films would most certainly bear further detailed comparison. One might think of *Avatar*, I hazard, as a kind of positive reworking of *Apocalypse Now*.) Quaritch enjoys them in formation and their capacity for destruction of "primitive" foes just as much as Kilgore before him.

"You could step into his shoes...so to speak" does double-duty. It hints at Jake's disability (shortly to be unpleasantly mocked by the ex-marine mercenaries on [his arrival on] Pandora, but it *also* establishes the inhumanity of the two be-coated company reps there with Jake at his brother's cremation, and in a very particular way: the remark shows a marked lack of sensitivity to human sensibilities at the death of a loved one. It leaves no space for grief. It makes a mockery of the ancient need for solemn funeral rites (thus contrasting with what we see later, witnessing the funeral rites for an old deceased Na'vi person, during Jake's 'training' at Neytiri's hands). For blithely stepping into one's brother's shoes directly upon his death, negating his existence and the sadness of his death, would be a negation of grief and of human relations. No-one can replace a person, and especially, ironically, for a twin sibling: that unique link has gone forever. When the company man says "You could step into his shoes", before he realises (under a stare from his colleague) that he has crossed a line in saying it (and so adds, "so to speak", to try to undo the damage), he is acting as if it is OK to simply *use* one's closest relatives, even the very closest there can be (a twin-sibling), as a means of personal advancement.

This keys into my point (3) in my previous letter. This moment is part of the film's intense concern with death and rebirth, literal and spiritual, and with being asleep (and how wonderful or terrible that can be) and being awake / awakening (ditto). Jake's avatar will be his new twin, a "gift" from his brother struck down for the paper in his wallet (another mark of the great difference between the grim world of future-Earth on this scenario and the special world that Jake is about to head toward).

And this also exemplifies my response to your 'experts' on scriptwriting who don't like *Avatar's* opening. I think that the opening of the film by contrast is an absolute masterpiece of compression, containing and working through the film's great themes over and over in different ways in a very short time, leading one in, through at times an experience of overwhelm and some confusion as you say, to the bewildering mystery of the life-changing opportunity that the new world will offer. Whenever one encounters an artwork that pushes the boundaries, especially perhaps one that does so by awaking but also revitalising and recreating mythic and archetypal images and questions, it will exceed the categories of 'experts' who seek to mechanically generate obvious scripts/formulae. The multi-layeredness is *the point*. Identical twins, eerily closer-than-close; bodies and avatars, damaged or undamaged and/or at-risk; waking and sleeping; dreaming in the sense of mere escapism and dreaming in the sense of visioning a better future; Gods and men; sky-gods and gaian immanences; enlightenment and mere bare life; intrinsic and instrumental; a web of life or of artifice and machinery; heaven and Earth; flying and

running and feeling the Earth beneath one's feet or not; all of this is present and inter-leaved and over-woven in the film's opening(s).

And as you say, Peter, a marvellous feature of this, filmicly, is the way that one is dropped into it as if into a dream. One doesn't even *notice* the absence of title credits, so swift is the immersion. One might connect this to the clever way in which *Titanic* opens, also widely and wrongly criticised: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xtVyu-A3vkY> . And with the masterful opening of *Inception*, another philosophical film centred around dreaming. A particularly close parallel in terms of the (near-)absence of opening credits and more besides though is *Michael Clayton*. Rather like *Avatar*, this film *ends* with many of what are conventionally the 'opening' credits. We are told at the end that the film (at its end) is presenting... Michael Clayton. What has actually happened in the film is that he has *become* a person, he has become (as Nietzsche puts it) the person he is. Present. He was a cipher, a moral vacuum, when the film began; by the end, despite (or: via) throwing away all the trappings of his surface identity (the paper in his wallet, and his wallet too), he has become someone worthy of his own name. Similarly, Jake has become who he was destined to be: Eywa's representative on Earth, an avatar, gone as far as he can from the paltry loyal American/Earthling who he was at the opening, painfully reborn (like Michael Clayton) as a person whose eyes are open and who can look himself in the mirror.

This is the journey that the film invites us to take, ourselves.

Faithfully,

Rupert

19 September 2014

Dear Rupert,

I am intrigued by your comments on *Michael Clayton*, and also certainly agree that a comparison between *Avatar* and *Apocalypse Now* would be very rewarding, or indeed between *Avatar* and the other films you mention. But I think that, at this point, we need to be a bit careful about moving away from *Avatar* to discussions of other films or novels (like LeGuin's remarkable book *The Word for World is Forest*, which you mentioned in your first letter in this round). We have to ask ourselves how these discussions help our understanding of *Avatar*, its origins and its worldwide impact?

Perhaps I should have explained why I tend to reference both *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) and *Star Wars* (1977) in my writings on *Avatar*. From many published interviews with Cameron we know that seeing *2001* was such a momentous experience for him that it first planted the idea in him one day to become a filmmaker. And when he first saw *Star Wars*, he knew that he finally had to act on this idea - and he did. These then are milestones in Cameron's life. But they are also milestones in the history of popular cinema (as I have discussed here: http://www.puremovies.co.uk/columns/2001-a-space-odyssey-the-ultimate-spectacle/ and http://www.puremovies.co.uk/columns/the-impact-of-star-wars/). Both films were hugely successful and exerted an enormous influence on audiences (including many

future filmmakers); they helped to establish Science Fiction and fantasy as the two types of film which have dominated the global box office since the late 1970s. In other words, they helped to create the cinematic culture into which *Avatar* was released with such great impact in 2009.

There are other lines of influence which link LeGuin's novel and *Apocalypse Now* to *Avatar*, although they are perhaps less direct. At some point, we may want to explore this in more detail, but for the time being I just want to make a couple of suggestions. LeGuin has said that she wrote *The Word for World is Forest* (first published in 1972) in 1968 in response to the Vietnam war, and *Apocalypse Now* originally was a project developed by George Lucas (yes, the man behind *Star Wars*, as unlikely as this may sound to many) and John Milius (who Lucas knew from film school, and who later styled himself as a 'Zen fascist') in the late 1960s, also, of course, in reaction to the Vietnam war. Lucas and Milius belonged to a group of young filmmakers who were trying to set up an alternative to Hollywood in San Francisco, under the leadership of Francis Ford Coppola and the name 'Zoetrope'. Unfortunately, Zoetrope's first production - George Lucas's rather experimental Science Fiction film *THX 1138* (1971), in which aesthetically we can, I think, see the influence of *2001*- did not live up to expectations, and Zoetrope collapsed (at least as far as film production was concerned). In the aftermath of this Lucas and Milius's Vietnam project ended up with Coppola - and Lucas was determined from now on to make films which would be accessible to large audiences, thus preparing the ground for *Star Wars*.

Born in 1954 in Canada and growing up near the American border, James Cameron was an avid reader of Science Fiction, reading both the 'classics' (Asimov, Clarke etc.) and the new writers emerging in the 1960s, and while, in the many interviews I have read, he never mentions LeGuin, he must have come across her work because she was such a high-profile writer in those days. (I should add here that, born in Germany in 1961, I also was a Science Fiction addict, and I certainly devoured half a dozen LeGuin novels as soon as I was old enough to understand them.) Cameron also would have been aware of debates about the Vietnam war, even more so when he moved to California in 1971. At this point, while already dreaming about becoming a filmmaker due to the viewing of *2001*, Cameron did not yet join the filmmaking community - but he was at least living in the same state where Lucas, Coppola and others were trying to reimagine American cinema.

What I am suggesting, then, is that we can - and perhaps should - use references to other films, novels etc. to map the broader cultural history which both *Avatar* and James Cameron belong to. What do you think?

To conclude this letter, I want to return to a more detailed discussion of *Avatar*, using your very brief reference to *Titanic* as a jumping off point (as it were). I think that in 2009 and 2010 it was probably unavoidable for *Avatar*'s prospective viewers (even if they had otherwise little knowledge about contemporary cinema) to come across references to the fact that *Avatar* was the first film in twelve years from the maker of *Titanic*, which had widely been touted as the most successful film of all time around the world.

Now, what might it mean to approach *Avatar* with *Titanic* in mind? What elements might strike a chord for those whose expectations were shaped by their previous viewings of *Titanic*? There is first and

foremost the love story, here across the barrier between species rather than classes; the epic scope and sense of fundamental historical change (both films show the end of one era and the beginning of another); the emphasis on disaster (the sinking of the Titanic, the destruction of nature and native community); the focus on technological hubris (the ship that could not sink, the weapons that could not fail) and the superior forces of nature (the iceberg, the living forest); the voiceover narration by a physically restricted character (an extremely old woman, a paraplegic); the trauma of loss (the male lover's death in *Titanic*, the male protagonist's initial loss of his brother); the mournful song over the end credits. One might also say that in both films destruction turns out to be necessary for a new beginning (Rose's liberation and the emergence of a less stratified society in one case; the union of different Na'vi tribes, and the redemption of some humans through the Na'vi in the other). Finally, both films emphasise that loss is never quite final: the lost lover lives on in Rose's memory and her final fantasy as well as the story she tells about him; the Na'vi's Tree of Life is apparently populated by the spirits of their dead (including that of Grace Augustine). Of course, in looking out for such similarities between the two films, we might also pay particular attention to their differences: female vs. male narrator, historical vs. futuristic setting, bitter sweet vs. (apparently) happy ending, accident vs. battle etc.

Perhaps we can take another look at the opening sequence we have been discussing with *Titanic*-related expectations in mind.

Faithfully,

Peter

24 Sept. 2014

Dear Peter;

Yes, the connections with Titanic certainly intrigue and impress. I'd add the following to your list:

- • The music in *Titanic* strikingly anticipates that of *Avatar*. I think that this evinces more than superficial similarities between the two films.
- • Why was the good ship *Titanic* so-named? After the titans, a race that hubristically and disastrously rose up to seek to rival the gods. That is what is so fascinating, so archetypal, about the story of the *Titanic*. That it epitomises the danger and absurdity and temptingness of Man's (I use the male gender here deliberately: it is rarely Woman's) setting himself up above nature. As a would-be god; as a titan. *Avatar* ups the ante: it features hubristic anti-nature men from Earth who have "killed their Mother" oppressing a people within whom an avatar of God (of Ey'wa) is walking.
- • It is made explicit in *Titanic* why the *Titanic* proved not only to be sinkable but to be sunk: Its creation was a fundamentally hubristic, boastful and *unprecautionary* act. It was too

big; too big to have any manoevrability (It couldn't turn in time to avoid any obstacles it encountered). It was forced to travel too fast. It lacked protection against external shocks; it was unresilient and not designed enough with safety in mind. Superficially it looked good, but, partly as a result of aesthetic choices, had too few lifeboats. All of these features can be understood either literally or metaphorically (or both) as features of our capitalist industrial-growth 'ecology' (and our unspiritual economism) that are under critique more explicitly at various points in *Avatar*.

- • In the most famous scene of *Titanic*, Jack teaches Rose to what... To *fly*...: http://www.imdb.com/video/imdb/vi596549657 / http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fPoMFB0FjYg The flying in *Avatar* is literal, but begins, as we discussed above, in dream. And in any case what matters about the flying in *Avatar* is arguably more what it symbolises: the capacity to connect with another being and to trust yourself to and in them (the *connection* with the igran depends on trust – trusting the igran, trusting oneself, and trusting one's teacher --, in a way that joins with the very strong emphasis on trust between Rose and Jack which midwifes Rose's ability to trust herself), which can lead to you doing something wonderful and 'impossible'.

- • *Titanic*, like *Avatar*, is about daring to dream and daring to wake up. This is obvious in Jake and Rose. But other specific examples can also be cited: e.g. *Avatar* begins with a dream of paradise; *Titanic* ends with a vision of heaven.

- • Jack is reborn in Rose; Jake is reborn in himself.

- • Finally, and crucially, at a key moment close to the famous 'flying' scene, about halfway through the movie, what does Jack say to Rose? "I see you"! That very phrase, the most central of all in *Avatar*, is anticipated in *Titanic*. And not just as a verbal formulation: it means the same thing. Jack sees who Rose really is, or who she really could be, if she allows herself to escape her prison and to emerge as a person connected to others and to everything.

As Christopher Vogler discusses in detail in *The writer's journey*, Titanic is in all sorts of ways improbable as a film: I mean, it's becoming the biggest blockbuster of all time was judged highly improbable by studio executives who objected to numerous aspects of it, from the filming on the wreck of the actual *Titanic* through the elaborate narrative structure to the great length of it (I mean, of the film!) and the sheer amount of time taken up with the burgeoning love-story before the iceberg even hits. In particular, the long 'opening' of the film was much-criticised, and attempts were made to alter it. Isn't that interesting: the opening of *Avatar* was also intensely criticised, albeit for superficially different reasons, as we discuss above: *Avatar* is supposedly too *compressed*, at the beginning. My view is that both films work very well as hero's journeys, as mythic works that range deep into our archetypes and assumptions and press the viewer to become involved. In particular, I would defend the opening of both films against the standard criticisms made of them: and I'd cite the vast popularity of both films as among the evidence one can use against the criticisms that were made of them, and in particular of their openings.

A key difference between the two films is that *Avatar* takes one much further into a *transformative* realm, and much further into a basically ecologistic alternative to growthist hubris. Thus, while *Titanic* serves as a marvellous 'prequel' to *Avatar*, *Titanic* alone wouldn't be likely to potentiate much political or ecological change.

Avatar is the big one. The film that takes Cameron finally into a place where empires like America and China start to shake, and where fans and film-thinkers who are open to saying "I see you" to the film itself might start to remake the world in the film's image...

29. Sanders' Green New Deal: A Realistic Response to the Emergency That Will Define Our Lifetimes [2019]

Frank Scavelli and Rupert Read discuss the 2020 United States election and the Democratic primary, praising the boldness of Sanders' Green New Deal while offering criticism from a genuinely ecologistic perspective. This article first appeared in *Common Dreams*.

Contrary to what the New York Times recently suggested, Bernie's plan is the only one put forward by a major candidate that represents a level of ambition that matches the scale of the unprecedented crisis in which humanity now finds itself deeply entangled.

On November 14th, the *New York Times* published an article which discussed the Green New Deal as proposed by Senator Bernie Sanders, claiming to speak for 'experts,' and framing the article around what readers were led to believe were authoritative opinions. As *Common Dreams* reported, the *Times*—without input from a single climate scientist or relevant academic—instead based their article on opinions from "an adviser to South Bend, Indiana Mayor Pete Buttigieg, a business professor and maxed-out Hillary Clinton donor, and a Democratic strategist who does public relations work for the chemical industry." This assembled cast took a predictably dim view of Sanders' massive, dual-purpose environmental and economic plan which, like Franklin Delano Roosevelt's original New Deal, aims to fundamentally reshape the social and economic fabric of the United States, this time in an ecological, as well as pro-worker, direction.

The *Times* piece also implied that the extent of Sanders' plan, which proposes to spend $16 trillion over ten years, and which goes much further than any other in the Democratic primary field (Senator Warren's plan, the next largest, aims to spend $2 to $3 trillion), is "unrealistic" and largely functions as a political ploy to enliven his base. In making this implication, the *Times* went so far as to compare the Green New Deal to Donald Trump's abortive border wall.

One of us (Read) had the good fortune to meet Sanders in Washington D.C. way back in the 1980s, and commend him to his face for his impressive work seeking to rewrite the map of U.S. politics. Senator Sanders has consistently been raising the alarm on global overheat for decades now—and is mirrored in his concerns by every relevant individual and organization which has assessed the threat posed by climate breakdown and ecological collapse. The narrow window in which we will have any ability to blunt the worst of the climate crisis is rapidly closing—if it has not already closed. It is clear that more and more people feel an unimaginable threat to themselves, their children, and to all life on this planet looms just over the horizon—and for many is already here.

Activists in major cities willing to face arrests by the thousands, children striking from school, crying and excoriating assembled world leaders at the United Nations, are only the most visible bubbling-up of a collective fear and trembling felt by hundreds of millions, and particularly by young people, who, unless fundamental change begins immediately, face a century of nightmares and the likely collapse of global society. Yet corporate media outlets such as the *New York Times* and their allies in the major political parties—while paying lip service to the threat posed by climate breakdown and ecological collapse—continue by and large to undermine any real attempts at critical action. Had the *Times* actually consulted the experts, they would have recast the issue along the following lines:

> Global CO2 production is increasing rather than decreasing. The year 2018 saw a 3 percent increase in emissions from 2017. And 2019 will see an even larger increase. Feedback mechanisms are already kicking in which could doom even the most vigorous attempts conceivable to halt climate breakdown and ecological disintegration. The oceans, which have absorbed more than 90% of the heat caused by greenhouse gases—and as a result are acidifying at ten times the rate seen in the last 300 million years—may well be nearing the end of their ability to do so, the likely proximate cause of the rapid uptake in warming since 2014. We await, within years, the first ever ice-free Arctic summer in our history, known as the Blue Ocean Event, and with it the loss of the albedo effect. Ice deflects 90% of incoming solar energy, water absorbs almost all of it: the same amount of energy which will turn solid, frozen ice at 32°F into liquid water at 33°F, when applied to the same water at 33°F, will heat that water to 176°F. Methane release, the most feared of the feedback mechanisms, is beginning to bubble up from Arctic permafrost. It is totally unknown to what extent methane could cause further warming; there is estimated to be the equivalent of 1.5 trillion tons of CO2 locked in the permafrost, two times that which we have released since the Industrial Revolution.

It is entirely within the realm of possibility that, even if all man-made carbon emissions ceased today, the feedback heating resulting from methane release and loss of the albedo effect could still send the planet hurtling into a "Hothouse Earth" scenario. We already have at least another half degree of warming 'baked into' the global climate system, pushing us right up to 2°C of warming and perhaps making the initiation of feedback loops, to the extent which they haven't already been triggered, inevitable. To maintain an even vaguely stable climate, we not only need to cease all emissions, we must actively draw down atmospheric carbon as quickly as possible, through restoration of biodiverse ecosystems including mass non-monocultural reforestation.

It is no exaggeration that every day which goes by brings us closer to an abyss.

The abyss which we face might even be along the lines of an event the Earth experienced 250 million years ago known as the Great Dying, in which 96 percent of marine species and 70 percent of terrestrial species were eradicated. Scientists believe that this extinction event was owed to rapid global heating caused by enormous releases of CO2, in that case from volcanic activity—and methane hydrate deposits from the sea floor, a danger we now face, too. The fact that rapid release of methane and CO2 on comparable levels to what we are now experiencing—over 10,000 years, instead of 250 years—could virtually annihilate the biosphere of a world untrammeled by human activity should give any thinking person pause as to the ability of the badly fragmented and degraded world ecosystem to respond to dangerous anthropogenic climate change.

We have already entered what scientists are calling the 6th Mass Extinction: in fact, so far, the main driver of this ongoing extinction event is human destruction of natural habitats; anthropogenic climate deterioration is only beginning to kick in as a primary driver of biodiversity-devastation. It is estimated that without profound change to our way of life a million species could be extinct by 2030 or so, and possibly half of all species alive today will be exterminated by 2050. We are, in effect, gradually but systematically annihilating the biosphere through a combination of relentless economic expansion and rapid-onset climate change, to which species, including our own, will have no time to truly adapt. Complex human society will almost certainly not survive serious, abrupt climate change, starting with the precarity of our food supply and unfolding from there; as a species, we will not survive a total ecological collapse. The UN and numerous studies have all warned of food shortages, ecosystem collapse, and social disintegration in the mid-20th century if trends go unaltered. As the situation deteriorates, we will gradually lose our ability to respond collectively in a sophisticated way.

Beyond this, it is worth noting that scientific modeling of the rapidity of climate change has routinely underestimated the threat posed: because of the nature of organizations such as the IPCC, their predictions—while incredibly grim—are inherently as conservative as the science allows, and lag behind the state of the world. Outcomes have fairly consistently been on the most extreme end of IPCC predictions, and sometimes beyond these (as in the case of ice-melt, which has exceeded supposed worst-case scenarios).

Studies and the IPCC reports which highlight these threats frequently cite the need for a "War Time" mobilization to stave off the worst effects, evoking the retooling of the U.S. and world economy of the 1930s and 1940s in response to the Great Depression and the Second World War. The Sanders-esque Green New Deal's size and scope, unlike other Democratic plans offered—which are less than one-fifth its size—is the only plan which aims at precisely this, setting the entire society on a true war-footing, with the enemy being climate-nemesis and the collapse of the world ecosystem.

The plan, briefly, aims to create 20 million good-paying, largely union jobs via tremendous investments in infrastructure, energy, ecological restoration and preservation, and sustainable agriculture. It will convert the power grid to 100 percent renewable energy by 2030, and completely decarbonize the economy by no later than 2050—no easy feat since the United States has not invested in the

modernization of its energy system and transportation infrastructure in decades. (It should be noted that, far from being over-ambitious, as critics claim, this plan is in fact under-ambitious from the perspective of Extinction Rebellion). Under the Green New Deal, the United States will lead the world in change, and will invest in and encourage similar steps abroad.

It is amazing that so many effusively 'patriotic' Americans, who regularly make proclamations of American exceptionalism, oppose the Green New Deal. Declarations of American greatness implicitly harken to the omnipresent national myth of the country's character and experience during the Second World War / mid-20th century period, which Trump knowingly evokes in his pledge to "Make America Great Again." The same people, in both political parties and throughout the media, who lionize this era of U.S. history—when America enacted the New Deal, had one-third union membership among workers (now less than 7 percent in the private sector), and a 90% tax rate on personal incomes over $3.5 million (2018 dollars) under a Republican President, General Dwight Eisenhower—now do not want the United States to lead the world in meeting the greatest challenge humanity has ever faced.

Scientists recently estimated that planting 1 trillion trees, in and of itself, could draw down as much as 2/3 of the CO2 we have emitted since 1750. This kind of massive undertaking, requiring enormous public investment and coordination, is exactly the type of solution on offer in the Green New Deal, with its pledge to create millions of jobs funding ecological restoration, climate mitigation, and infrastructure work, in the process fundamentally transforming American society.

The Green New Deal, from a realistic ecological perspective, is far from perfect. We need, along with carbon mitigation efforts, radical relocalisation, deep adaptation, and a definitive step in the de-growth direction: the economy, categorically, cannot continue to grow exponentially on a finite, already badly damaged planet, and we have long since overshot the Earth's carrying capacity in terms of economic expansion. Thus the fundamental problem with Sanders's plan from a genuinely ecologistic perspective is that it remains trapped within the defunct (il-)logic of economic growthism.

But Sanders at least has a serious offer for addressing this long emergency that is fast becoming an existential threat. His Green New Deal even takes some real steps in the direction of localization: for instance, in its central plank of renewing small-scale, sustainable family farms and revitalizing local and urban food production. It would, by the current sorry standards of Western political systems, be an incredibly ambitious improvement over the current state of affairs. It would staunch the worst of the bleeding while the U.S. and the rest of global society adjusts to the reality of our future: that, because of the timelags in the world's climate system, the feedbacks already unleashed, and the amount of time it will take humanity, worldwide, to turn the supertanker that is this system around *even if we win*, the climate is almost certainly going to get much, much worse for generations to come. It is effectively only a question of how much worse things well get, and there are several, very different futures available to us, some unimaginably worse than others.

Our task over the next century and beyond is to save and shelter whatever we can of the biosphere to pass on to future generations, and in doing so adapt new ways of thinking of our society and connection with the Earth which do not rely on unthinking exploitation and endless economic

'growth.' Perhaps growth could be thought of in new ways: no longer the exponential growth of our economy, but a growth in our spiritual depth, our connection with each other, the animals and the world around us; a growth in the emotional intelligence of our whole species, of our appreciation for the arts, of new discoveries in technical expertise; a growth in the real joys of life. For make no mistake: if we get the transformation that is inevitably coming right, then, *even in the face of the tragically inevitable climate deterioration that we are now committed to* for some time to come, the lives of most of us can actually improve, as we relocalize ourselves, rediscover community, reduce loneliness, reduce the drivers of obesity and feed instead the drivers of good health. The beautiful coincidence is that the very things we need to do in order to address the climate and ecological emergency are in almost every case the very things we need to do in order to improve our lives and livelihoods from the sorry state—indexed by the huge increase in mental ill-health over the last two generations—that they are currently in.

Sanders's plan is flawed, in particular in that it remains committed to an increasingly-impossible outdated vision of economic growthism. But in its level of ambition, it deserves nothing but praise. Compared to the offer of the other Democratic candidates, it is far closer to the mark. Exactly contrary to the claims in the *New York Times* against which we have written this piece: Sanders's plan is far more realistic than his critics. It is realistic in that it proposes a level of ambition that matches the scale of the unprecedented crisis in which humanity now finds itself deeply entangled.

Considering the United States has spent 6 to 8 trillion dollars turning vast swathes of the Middle East and North Africa into a hellscape of ethnic cleansings, open-air slave markets, and jihadist beheadings to virtually no conceivable benefit, but rather an increased likelihood of terrorism, millions of innocents killed or wounded, and of course, immense profits for defense contractors, it seems like twice this amount to stave off an otherwise-certain, looming, epoch-ending downturn in societal wellbeing, productive capacity, and the effective death of nature is not only, contrary to the opinion of the *New York Times* author who we have here challenged, profoundly realistic: *It is the least we can do at this time to have any hope of creating a livable future*.

30. Activist engagement with the 'Davos set' [2020]

Jem Bendell and Rupert Read discuss the unlikeliness of elite action on the climate and ecological crises, but remain hopeful, in spite of it all, of an 'Elite Rebellion' – just 3 or 4 percent of elites devoting their full time, energy and resources to these emergencies could bring about exponential change. This article first appeared in *The Ecologist*.

One man's promise of putting less than ten percent of his wealth towards climate action generated a lot of media attention.

It sounded like it might make a difference, as he - Jeff Bezos - is the world's richest man. Could this be the sign of things to come, as more of the world's billionaires resist a narrow pursuit of profit, power and fame to try and save humanity from environmental disaster?

Read: Davos and capitalist time

If so, could seasoned activists like us find useful ways to engage these people and generate a quantum leap in impact? After all, the situation is bleak, and everything should be considered. To expolore this, we spent some time mingling with world elites at Davos and elsewhere - hearing their views and sharing our own.

Empowerment

There will be no short cut to global social change. Climate activists must focus on building power, transforming systems and building support among diverse communities. We must only welcome billionaire support if it specifically enables such empowerment.

Sustained climate action will require a fresh settlement on the fair distribution of resources, as we face a very challenging future.

Such redistributions of power and resources have never been achieved merely by enlightened elites handing over what they are accustomed to.

A stark example of how billionaires and their global gatherings are not often inclined to such 'radical' agendas is the way that the World Economic Forum (WEF) has engaged with the climate emergency. We welcome the alarm sounded at Davos this year, and the discussions of just how bad climate change has become for humanity. But that does not mean that they already have significant suggestions for change.

Manifesto

Davos attendees launched a manifesto this year. It's titled, "The universal purpose of a company in the fourth industrial revolution", and it contains warm words about some corporate efforts toward a future for humanity.

But we can't see anything in it about firms (e.g. Facebook) not undermining democracy or action on the causes of our time: social and ecological justice.

The Davos manifesto ignores the diminution of democracy - at a time when we direly need it to be deepened - that corporates have influenced.

Nor can we see anything in the document about the necessary role of the state in much-needed market interventions to address climate breakdown, such as the Green New Deal or the green industrial revolution.

So this 'Davos manifesto' also ignores what is agreed by most observers to be an absolutely key part of any genuine solution to the vast problem defining our time.

Inequality

The rising tide of climate chaos proves that the corporate model of running the world for profit has failed. The best 'manifesto' from Davos would be to take their members' money out of politics-as-usual and corporate media, and let ordinary people decide how to respond to a devastating global crisis that current elites have presided over.

At Davos this year, a notable feature was the call by Micah White, a co-founder of the Occupy protest movement, for the world's movements for justice and democracy to seek an alliance with the world's elites in order to address the emergency. One of us, Read, was seated by Micah when he made his pitch, at Davos, for this 'alliance of opposites'.

You can read Micah's account of that semi-confidential meeting here. Read was one of those who argued in the room that it would be simply impossible for ecological breakdown to be stopped in a world which allowed inequality to persist at its current level. Succinctly: there's no emission space left for private jets.

Micah's strategy and vision is fascinating: but on this crucial point and the non-negotiable need for a profound deepening of democracy, there seems to be a gap between his ideas and Extinction Rebellion.

For instance, the Davos set believe that we should mobilise our movements to plant a trillion trees. Whereas we join our fellow climate activists in wanting to change the economic system that trashes forests and doesn't incentivize their planting. Some elites think we can leave the existing distribution of wealth and power intact and save the world, while most people we know in XR see that as wishful thinking.

Redistribution

What is a pragmatic approach in the face of an unprecedented emergency?

Our view is that there is no possibility of the crisis being tackled while the kind of people at Davos retain their wealth. We don't just need 10 percent of their wealth spent or lent for climate action - we

must change economic systems so that there is a fairer distribution of limited resources as we collectively strive for net zero emissions and support each other as climate change disrupts our agriculture, water, cities and health.

Just a quick look at current climate impacts shows that redistribution is essential right now. For instance, in Kenya, climate impacts have led to fresh vegetables doubling in price in the past months.

Similar situations are being experienced around the world. Faced with such a situation, there are even calls for tax cuts on oil and even subsidies, to help bring down the price of food. That is the self-reinforcing disaster that will spiral out of control if emergency social justice is not the centre of the climate agenda.

Alliances

Climate activists can respond to this social and economic dimension of the struggle by forging more alliances across sectors and classes, including with trade unions, networks of school children, faith institutions and others.

Such alliances will be necessary not only to challenge current power but also to maintain new formations of power to deliver the massive changes required. One example is the need to engage trade unions, so that more of them decide to make climate safety as important to their bargaining and strike action as pay and conditions.

When that happens, governments will begin to see the massive economic disruption that will occur if they don't make a climate justice agenda their foundational policy platform. The result of such alliances and policy changes will present a direct challenge to the wealth, privilege and power of elites.

We say this without any rancor towards the wealthy. We say it simply because it's fact. It's *because* we care about everyone, including the super-rich and their kids, that we say to the Davos elite: it's time to give up your vast wealth and privilege.

Let your money go: allow that money to be devoted, no strings attached, to the effort to change the world so that we all have a chance to survive on a more level living-field.

Change

But we think it is improbable. Unfortunately, it is not likely that corporations and the rich in general are going to swing behind radical action on the eco-emergency.

But it seems to us realistic to aim to reach a few of them - those who have truly understood the science and the complicit system - to become true allies of the now-necessary radicalism.

Imagine if we managed to get (say) 3.5 percent of the super-rich on the side of reality as part of a 'Billionaire Rebellion'. Such eventualities would be completely game-changing.

That's a reason why, if one can keep one's head and heart, it's perhaps worth going to Davos to invite a resonant reaction. If a handful of billionaires recognize that the system they enable is wrong and cannot continue, and support the global grassroots climate movement, then we could see more rapid change.

Together, we might yet respond to our terrifying predicament with as much love, determination and courage as we have ever found.

31. Philosophy and Civilization: An Interview with Rupert Read, Spokesperson for Extinction Rebellion [2020]

Nathan Eckstrand interviews Rupert Read, focusing on the interrelation of his work as a professional philosopher with his ecological activism. This article first appeared in *The Blog of the American Philosophical Association (APA)*.

Philosopher Rupert Read is active in the climate change movement Extinction Rebellion, and has recently released a new book about his work there. He took time to talk with us about his work for the movement, his philosophical writings, and the role philosophy should play in addressing the challenge of global warming.

As an advocate for Extinction Rebellion, you argue our current civilization is doomed. Explain that claim and how you defend it in your work.

When we think about impending climate breakdown, there are three broad possibilities of what this could mean for us:

- The first is terminal decline leading to complete and utter social collapse.
- The second is that we will manage to create a successor civilization to succeed the collapse of this one.
- The third is that we will get our act together in time to turn things around and prevent civilizational *collapse*.

There is not much to be said about scenario one, beyond the acknowledgement that it is about the worst possible outcome imaginable. I'll come back to scenario two. While number three strikes me as by far *least* likely.

Why do I think that it is not possible to turn things around to preserve things roughly as they stand, and that even the third option just described is unlikely? Well it's been clear for some time now that our economic, political and social systems are making our planet uninhabitable, and that successive governments have failed to address their ecology- and climate-wrecking effects. Despite scientific consensus for decades on the climate emergency, we are in the absurd situation now of living in a 1-degree warmed world, while hurtling towards a predicted 1.5-degrees or greater of warming maybe within the next 10 years or so; and likely between 3-5-degrees by the end of the century.

There is no 'safe' level of warming, 'even' 2-degrees means the death of over 99% of the world's coral reefs – permanently defacing the ecology of our planet. The International Panel on Climate Change is unambiguous in its latest report that 2-degrees means the displacement of many millions of people through desertification and flooding. It means a greater frequency and a higher magnitude of the extreme weather events that are increasingly blighting the world. It means an increase in violence and war globally because of resource scarcity and hotter temperatures. It means increased frequency of pandemic and pestilence, with greater threats to our health and the food supply we rely upon to nourish us. And it likely means the eventual complete erasure of ice from both the North and South poles. These outcomes are simply not compatible with our civilization continuing. Add to them that I am very concerned about the possibility of some/ partial civilization collapse(s) before any of these, maybe through dire food shortages.

The 2015 Paris Accord, which is the international agreement touted as the most 'successful' attempt to-date at getting policy makers to face up to the climate emergency, is an entirely voluntary treaty with no enforcement mechanism whatsoever that relies upon conservative estimates of likely warming scenarios. Worse yet, the agreement counts upon the technophilic fantasy of widespread deployment of negative emissions technologies to effectively take global C02 emissions to below zero in the latter half of the century. Carbon capture and storage (CCS) is the technology that is supposed to be able to take the lead on this. But there are currently only a handful of CCS plants, which collectively make a negligible impact in removing carbon from the atmosphere. These are technologies that simply do not exist to anywhere the scale needed to meet the Paris targets and it is unclear whether they ever will exist. We are relying on technologies that we have not yet even developed to solve problems that we know if left unchecked will cause widespread ecological and social collapse certainly within the century, and probably within the next few decades.

The trajectory that we are on does not leave any real room for optimism that we will keep below two degrees warming. Something necessary for our civilization to continue. Because of this we ought to consider how we can use the dying days of this civilization to create something more robust to climate breakdown, and that no longer feeds the flames of that breakdown. A lot of my recent work has involved advocating what the academic Jem Bendell calls 'Deep adaptation'. This involves considering not just how we can mitigate environmental and ecological harms, but also how we can adapt as best we can to the harms that are already 'locked in'. This strikes me as a much more honest approach to climate breakdown. Thus, the second scenario that I outlined is what we should prepare for. In practice deep adaptation means localizing much production and democratic control, while moving away from the hypermobile world of industrial growth capitalism. It means fundamentally reshaping

society so that it is no longer recognizably *our* civilization. I hope we might be able to create something better.

Even if the third option *is* achieved, it will require transformative change to get there. Transformative Adaptation. We are nowhere near even considering this as a society, yet. I talk more on this subject (and more) in my new book with Samuel Alexander entitled, *Extinction Rebellion: Insights from the Inside*.

What areas of philosophy do you find most useful for making your argument? Are there any you believe hinder an appropriate understanding of the dilemma we currently face?

I spoke previously about the importance of deep adaptation, and how that framework can help us create a new civilization more robust to impending climate breakdown. There is a lot of philosophical work to be done in conceptualizing what a more resilient civilization looks like. Questions of how, and to what extent, we ought to localize production are key here. This might not sound like philosophy, but it is: it is about questioning for instance the assumption that cosmopolitan globalism is desirable. It's about considering seriously the virtues of indigenous wisdom.

Consider questions too of how we preserve the most attractive elements of our current civilization. There are elements of intercultural exchange that globalization has facilitated that are worth preserving. And political and civil liberties. An important philosophical task going forward will be envisaging and articulating a plan for deep adaptation that doesn't turn its back on these unless there is no alternative. This is a profoundly philosophical investigation into what we value and how to square those values with ecological reality.

In addition to this, we need to challenge and overhaul dominant ideologies that have facilitated our civilization's terminal decline. Some of these are familiar targets: i.e our relationship toward consumption and materialism.

However, clearly these consumerist and consumptive behavior patterns don't appear out of nowhere. Consider how almost every government in the world prioritizes economic growth as its key policy objective. Ecologists have, for a long time, pointed out that the pursuit of endless economic growth is incompatible with the finitude of our planet. Thus, the system of industrialized growth capitalism is simply incompatible with maintaining a habitable planet. We need therefore to do philosophical work in challenging the ideology of *growthism*.

When confronted with the ecological realities of our economic activity, many people presume that new technologies will play a near-messianic role in fixing our ecological predicament. Increasingly absurd fantasies abound from both left and right wing commentators. I lack the space to go into depth here, but quite frankly this is a recklessly inadequate survival strategy. Even if technology *might* play a big role here, is it worth staking our planetary survival on the hope that we invent something truly unprecedented? I think not. Thus, another ideology that needs challenging is our *technophilia*.

Philosophy is useful for interrogating these value systems and shedding light on the extent to which they are driving climate and ecological collapse. If we are going to avoid terminal ecological decline, then we will need to disavow some of these pervasive and unquestionable ideologies.

So. It's a matter of achieving freedom from inherited ideologies. The kind of freedom, liberation, that Wittgenstein's philosophy is designed to make possible. It is about interrogating (and reworking) assumptions such as 'progress'. It's about thinking deeply about what matters to us. It's about negotiating a crisis of meaning that for most people is only just beginning.

The argument for a radical shift in how humans live is informed by ideas about what a human is and our relationship to nature. Historically, these are contested concepts. How do you understand them?

What is nature? Two possibilities: nature as including us and nature as opposed to us. Two different senses of nature, two different things we could mean by nature. Nature as including us, nature is all-encompassing; or nature as opposed to us, nature is what we are not. Now what philosophers normally do in my opinion and experience, is they try to plump for one or the other of these they try to suggest that really nature should be thought of as everything and therefore as including us or that really nature should be opposed to us and we should be thought of as set apart from nature.

I would argue that *we need both*, that we need both senses of 'nature'. I would argue that is no accident that this concept (nature) is endlessly contested. I would argue that we need both senses of this concept of nature in order to do justice to it, in order to do justice to ourselves: as beings that are of course fully biological and ecological (and we forget that at our terrible cost) — but as beings that also need to notice that (we do so forget), and that are capable of doing damage to the rest of the web of life in a way incapable for other beings which do not have a sense of themselves as separate. Ironically, in order to preserve the rest of…nature adequately, we have to recall our sense of separation from it. If we don't do this, then we covertly think of ourselves as entitled to do whatever the hell we like: because whatever we do is 'natural'. And then we create a living/dying Hell.

Your earlier works are on Wittgenstein. Are there any insights from those works that influenced your current work?

In *Culture and Value* Wittgenstein wrote: 'Our civilization is characterized by the word 'progress'. Progress is its form rather than making progress one of its features. Typically, it constructs. It is occupied with building an ever more complicated structure'. This quote has stuck with me ever since I encountered it as a PhD student. Wittgenstein was a great critic of the ideologies of *scientism* and '*progress*' and was effective in shining in a light on just how endemic they are. As we previously discussed, there is a great deal of obfuscation in our culture's values. Often these values masquerade as simply objective matters of fact. Wittgenstein's work is liberatory in helping us identify dangerous ideological commitments that hide behind a veneer of 'objectivity' and inevitability.

Take, for example, the idea of 'progress' within our culture. 'You can't stop progress' is a phrase often bandied about. To me, this highlights a profound lack of awareness and a lack of steering of the direction that our civilization has taken. 'Progress' is often conceptualized as taking the form of

increased material consumption and technological innovation. Yet, once we interrogate this trajectory, we often find that many such 'innovations' don't really benefit the vast amount of people, and indeed are at root destroying our shared planetary home. The idea of progress has become decoupled from any meaningful benefit to humanity. Now obviously I am speaking here in generalities. Modern technology has brought many benefits. But a selective and cautious approach to the adoption of new technologies would serve humanity far better than the *laissez-faire* approach that dominates.

The influential 20th Century political philosopher Hannah Arendt saw this very clearly. My work on the Precautionary Principle, which I believe is an essential tool for our times, aims to expound it. Often described using proverbs such as 'look before you leap', at its heart, it is a safety net in an uncertain and often precarious world.

While many philosophers volunteer for or speak about issues they research, your activism seems to more central to your everyday work than the average scholar. How do you relate your activism to your other professional obligations?

Well there are points of intersection between my work as an professor of philosophy and my campaigning. Roughly, my activism has been informed by my research, and my research by my activism. Nevertheless, and despite some right-wing caricatures to the contrary, UK Universities are not particularly radical institutions! This is especially the case when it comes to thinking about climate breakdown.

Universities do not deny the seriousness of anthropogenic dangerous climate change directly, but they are often complicit through its near-absence across much of the curriculum. This is partly born of a fear of politicizing the problem. Yet unless we are willing to address the profoundly political questions raised by dangerous anthropogenic climate change, then we have no hope of avoiding worst-case scenarios and adapting to already locked-in harms.

In particular, there is an almost total avoidance of realism about climate breakdown and the risk of eco-driven societal collapse, in our universities. This is pathological.

I have tried to use my position to make sure that climate breakdown plays a big role in the philosophy programs that UEA offers. I am lucky to have several other colleagues who are deeply involved in green campaigning and politics. Nevertheless, the sad fact is that climate breakdown does not feature prominently or even at all on many courses. When this is the case, universities fail to offer a proper education to their students. Climate breakdown and eco-precariousness should be the lens through which most courses are taught. After all, the effects of these will invariably shape the world that our graduates will inherit. And may end it.

What steps do you encourage your readers or listeners to take for the betterment of humanity's future?

The most important thing that you can do is get involved in organized resistance to our economic and political systems. What we do collectively is far more important than what we do individually. I would

urge your readers to get involved in mass civil disobedience campaigns, such as those organized by Extinction Rebellion or the School Strike for Climate. You can find out more about XR and how it began by reading my new book.

If you are an academic philosopher, your place at this desperate moment in history is in attempting to be an organic intellectual with movements such as these. That is what I've been doing. And I wish there were more of us!

32. REVIEW: Michael Moore's Planet of the Humans [2020]

Deepak Rughani and Rupert Read offer both praise and searing criticism of Planet of the Humans. While the film rightly excoriates the corporatization of much of the environmental movement, and the vast over-optimism placed in renewables, it paints with far too wide a brush, suggesting there is no hope whatsoever. The film's indictment of consumer society and the failure of environmental movements to confront the changes we will need is apt, but the film could have, and should have, offered realistic alternatives, such as an energy-descent path toward a sustainable, non-consumeristic society.

Planet of the Humans is a deeply frustrating work: for it is both seminal and deeply problematic. Its foes have missed or tried to drown out the seminal importance it potentially has or had. Its fans have missed or tried to paper over its profound flaws. In this review we explore the fundamental insights it offers as well as illuminate — as the film sadly does not — a path for the constructive use of renewable energy going forward. A path that is rather more limited and specific than most of those who are excoriating the film would like to believe.

Defeatism and Despair

Let's start by exploring a few of the most vehemently expressed criticisms about this film. First, the accusation of sloppy journalism, including the use of out-of-date information as if it were still current.

Agreed!

Footage in the film of eco-hero Bill McKibben's deeply-unfortunate and unwise bioenergy-advocacy pre-2016 takes no account of his campaign efforts since that date, to raise awareness and halt this ecologically-devastating industry. McKibben has been walking a tightrope with industry since the inception of 350.org's Divestment Campaign. On the one hand it's a campaign designed to close the fossil fuel industry down by redirecting big finance away from this sector; on the other hand, industry investment in renewables is essential to 'meet' the intended reducing energy share from fossil fuels. Success with the former demands success with the latter: 350.org provided the stick, government subsidies, the necessary carrot.

Tragically, large-scale bioenergy (the recipient, utterly unjustifiably, of the largest share of subsidies) — or rather, the forests it has devastated — has been the sacrificial lamb, correctly exposed by Jeff Gibbs,

the film's director, as a renewable in *nothing* but name. Here in the UK, we subsidise the largest biomass burner on the planet – Drax in Yorkshire – which utilises pellets from biodiverse swamp forest in the Carolinas (biofuelwatch.org.uk/axedrax-campaign), shipped 4000km, and, crazily, zero-rated for emissions under old but legally binding rules!

Since 2016, McKibben has spoken out strongly against bioenergy. An inclusion of this would have offered more balanced and accurate journalism. (We'll come back to the point about the attempt to meet our society's energy demand through renewables toward the end of this piece.)

The use in the film of ten-year-old footage describing photovoltaics (PV) in its infancy, with an alleged negative energy return on energy investment (EROEI), is misleading compared to the high-efficiency PV used today, which return a healthy energy dividend. (Ketan Joshi has devastatingly criticised this aspect of the film.) That said, even efficient PV faces the issues of (to name just the main ones) energy-demanding silicon extraction, intermittency (leading to heavy storage requirements or building in of a lot of expensive redundancy), and limited lifespan; concerns which should inform the intended scale of use.

But the documentary wrongly leaves no hope. Gibbs rightly exposes the dependency of most wind and solar on fossil fuels, not only for construction but also as back up against intermittency. A transition to renewables, it then might appear, runs us over the same cliff as fossil fuels.

The film's conclusion, that over-'production'/over-consumption (and, to a lesser extent, over-population) are the real drivers, is unassailable, and it's mostly true to say that both mainstream environmental groups and political think tanks have shied away from expressing this fundamental truth, preferring to focus on the 'positive' message of renewables. This is a critical point. However, as already noted above, miraculous breakthroughs in efficiencies have been achieved in the last decade. Both solar PV and wind energy are now approaching an order of magnitude of higher efficiencies, and/or declining resource demand.

Moreover, whilst quite rightly calling out the complicit nature of some of the largest environmental groups with corporate rule and false hopes, the film, by implication, tars all environmental groups with the same brush. This is crude and quite unjustified.

A useful rule of thumb is that small radical/bottom-up environmental groups spring up (largely unfunded) in the gaps created by the non-systemic responses of the big players. For example, if mainstream environmental groups were truthful about the seriousness of the warming impact from aviation, there would have been no Plane Stupid (a radical grass roots response to aviation expansion), which forced large NGOs to take it seriously; no Extinction Rebellion (civil society's mass radical response to the collective disregard of the science on dangerous anthropogenic climate change and on ecosystem-destruction); and no Biofuelwatch (again, a radical grass roots response to the promotion of bioenergy as a renewable, by nearly all the mainstream NGOs), to name just three of literally thousands of radical grassroots groups responding to environmental and social justice issues globally.

In the final part of the film, the filmmakers repeatedly assert that "The takeover of the environmental movement by capitalism is now complete." This is a travesty, a dangerous defeatist slap in the face. It is absolutely senseless to tar radical grass-roots groups with the same brush as the Nature Conservancy or the World Wildlife Fund.

The seeming failure of both the renewables industry and the half-century old environmental movement to make any meaningful headway in safeguarding the earth leads Gibbs to the film's concluding position of sheer hopelessness. This is a viewpoint which we don't share.

'Blessed Unrest'

Michael Moore (the film's executive producer) maybe – is – a genius of simple and powerful comic political messaging. But, on this evidence, he is also a heartbreaking genius of staggering over-simplification. For (t)his film is heartbreakingly and dangerously over-simplified.

Those most resistant to fundamental change are having a field day. We can't recall a time when the Heartland Institute — the US's foremost lobby group promoting fossil fuel interests — has weighed in on behalf of the earth, yet now joins the bandwagon of fellow climate deniers calling to 'ditch renewables' to protect the environment! That alone should tip us off to something of the deeper usefulness of renewables, *beyond* their very concerning co-option by fossil fuel interests, rightly exposed in the film.

What gives *us* hope is what is missing from the film. Paul Hawken coined the term 'the blessed unrest' to describe the huge movement of individuals, communities, radical groups, and free-thinking, unfettered NGOs and think tanks, who drive systemic change from a grassroots level in society. Such change, often integrated at the level of local communities, becomes life-changing and represents a significant counter-current to the nihilistic societal position of 'business as usual'. This blessed unrest reflects more accurately the fuller expression of human awareness at this time.

Our own reluctant view is that, even so, civilisation is clearly at present on a trajectory to collapse, primarily due to the likely near-term failure of key life support systems and of human systems that depend upon them (notably, the food-supply system), and that this process appears already to be underway. There hasn't been enough honesty about this in the environmental movement to date, nowhere near enough. The film is right to suggest that far too often it's been assumed that green tech (plus depoliticised individual action) can somehow save us.

It is going to take a vast, rapid, widespread transformation in systems and mindsets to prevent collapse. The post-Coronavirus reset is almost certainly our last chance to do this (and there are already worrying signs that that last chance is being missed), for these reset-opportunities don't come along every year nor even every decade.

A Managed 'Energy Descent'

Our only remaining choice is whether we carry on business as usual and face catastrophic societal breakdown, (from sustained food shortages and/or energy outages, for example), or whether we

consciously effect an energy descent in parallel with the rapid expansion of local food production. It's a choice between remaining naively optimistic (i.e. unconscious) while the economic and energy mirages just about hold together for a while longer, or using this last window of opportunity to effect a transition which creates some genuine long-term resilience.

Renewables, and particularly micro-renewables such as roof-top solar combined with community-scale wind turbines ('appropriate technology' rather than megatech), can bring energy security to the local level where social responsibility and vitality is greatest. Add to this the complementary role of each — wind is frequently at its strongest when solar is at its weakest — and peaks and troughs in energy availability can generally be predicted. Matching demand to availability will then need to be met by creative social adaptation to intermittency, e.g. adjusting use of electrical appliances to match availability. In this way redundancy — energy-intensive infrastructure back up (*excluding* pumped hydro and similarly *effective* means of storage of renewably-generated energy)* — can be reduced to a minimum.

Combine these three changes; re-focusing on efficient micro- and community-scale renewables, social adaptation to intermittency, and significantly reducing the need for energy redundancy. Now add a fourth component, the social imperative for demand reduction at scale, and we have the beginnings of a framework for a meaningful re-direction of society's response to both the climate crisis, and future energy security.

The consciousness that will be required to meet and create these changes will likely lead to much more open discussion about population growth, and we may well see for instance a voluntary societal shift towards much fewer and smaller families in the next generation or indeed sooner, to provide more space for nature (and for each other). Concerns about severe resource shortages going forward, as well as cultural acceptance of the need for a socially responsible and humane descent from our overshoot civilisation, will be core components of this consciousness.

This is what is missing from the film: a sense of how genuine renewables *could work* to power a successor human civilisation. But nota bene: *They will only work at a far smaller scale than is being fantasised at present*. The human future will be one of huge energy-descent. Either because we have managed to effect that transition more or less voluntarily. Or because (and tragically this is far more likely) society will have collapsed.

Too many of the critiques of *Planet of the Humans* reek of an unwillingness to acknowledge this point. The critiques are in some cases so aerated and shrill, in our view, because a sacred cow is being attacked: the idea that we can green *our existing economy*. The truth is that we cannot. A major energy-descent is non-negotiable.

Thus neither *Planet of the Humans* nor its ferocious critics have got it right. Proper renewables almost certainly*can* power a civilisation. Only *not* one which looks anything much like our current civilisation. Any attempt to power our civilisation by renewables would result in failure – and in ecosystemic devastation along the way.

33. Planet Over Profit: Coronavirus Has Shown us How to Stop a Climate Disaster [2020]

The 'XR Brains Trust' – a group that included the late David Graeber, Illona Otto, Rupert Read, Jason Hickel, Steve Keen, Steve Melia, Henry Muss, George Barda and Rebecca Bowers – 'a group of intellectuals associated with Extinction Rebellion (XR), lay out a post-COVID-19 vision for the policies that could deal with the multiple crises we now face — and how a renewal of democracy is essential to save us from future health and ecological disasters.' – Byline Times

A collective statement from Extinction Rebellion's 'Brains Trust' with proposals on how to tackle climate chaos after COVID-19

Financing a Crisis

This year we have received recent history's most dramatic wake-up call. This is true in an almost literal sense: we had been living in a kind of dream-world, governed by the imaginary power of the 'market and the economy', that we were encouraged to believe somehow operated of its own accord with semi god-like intelligence. Interfering with economics could only spell disaster.

COVID-19 has taught us that reality is exactly the other way around. Human beings are fragile creatures whose survival is entirely dependent on care for the environment and each other. The economy has been driving us to ecological disaster but, mercifully, the machine also has an off switch. The scope for intervention is much broader than we had imagined, as the coronavirus crisis has itself demonstrated.

As we unlock, it is imperative we act on this knowledge. And quickly.

The 'we' in this case refers to humanity as a whole, but it is important to emphasise that the overwhelming majority of humans already understand that 'normalcy' was a mirage. The origins of this pandemic — the mass destruction of wild animals' habitats; mistreatment by humans of those same animals; wanton increase in pressure on the biosphere; and untrammelled 'globalisation' – have made clear that human health and planetary health are mutually constitutive.

In this case the answer is clear: if we are to fend off further disasters, we must first of all address the structure of our economic system, and its relation to global governance.

Bailing Out

Let us imagine we decided to address the climate emergency with the same determination we have directed at stopping coronavirus. What would that mean in practice? We delayed for far too long when the virus emerged and, as the pandemic taught us, every moment of delay has lethal consequences.

In the case of the climate, the imminent concern is ensuring global temperatures do not rise above 1.5 degrees. This would mean achieving net-zero carbon neutrality by 2030 at the latest.

Alone, however, this would not be enough. We would then need to set about a project of planetary repair and the restoration of our natural world. Others have worked out in detail what material changes – in transport, energy use, industry, law and so forth – would be required in order to achieve carbon neutrality, whereby countries produce zero carbon emissions. Project Drawdown, Carbon Road Map, Zero Carbon Britain, The Climate and Ecological Emergency Bill, and The Green Recovery Act are all excellent examples.

It is true that the pandemic has demonstrated we have more tools on hand, and more resolve, than most of us imagined even a few months ago. We now understand which parts of the economy are really 'essential' – health, food, water, electricity, community, access to information etc. – and which were largely smoke and mirrors. We now recognise that most office work can be completed in a few hours a week, from home, and that large swathes of the economy are essentially redundant for the health and happiness of the population.

Trillions of dollars, pounds, and euros are being whisked into existence to salvage those businesses the Government feels need saving. However, these bailout simultaneously reveal a chilling truth about what is standing in the way of any common-sense solution to our climate emergency. Indeed, most of the carbon-intensive activity that currently threatens our survival: oil, coal, construction, air travel, agriculture, are in no sense the products of 'unregulated markets' — they are the result of direct Government support.

The International Monetary Fund recently reported that, in 2017 alone, the fossil fuel industry received $5.2 trillion dollars in subsidies from Governments worldwide. These subsidies by themselves constitute 6.2% of all global GDP. Almost all the most destructive industries would not survive without what is, in effect, a constant double bail-out: direct subsidies from Government, and indirect subsidies by Government support of a global financial system which, in turn, steers resources towards such industries because they are deemed 'safe' investments.

In terms of demands, then, this is an obvious place to start. Bailouts of these industries must stop, subsidies must be removed. To the heads of world Governments our message must be: if

you are really determined to give rich people even more money, can you at least find some way to do so that doesn't actually kill us?

Better still, of course, would be to redirect those trillions to people who aren't already rich. A basic income for all citizens should be a necessary part of any larger programme of green investment and retraining. In other words: bailing out people and the planet, not carbon corporates. But in order to make that possible, we will have to come to terms with what the 'global financial system' actually is.

Time to Defund Carbon

According to economic textbooks, the role of finance is to allocate economic resources towards best meeting future needs. In the process, we are always told, this guarantees freedom, happiness, and well-being. Global financial markets are, therefore, a kind of superior, planetary substitute for state systems of central planning. But if so, it's hard to imagine how they could do a more disastrous job, careering from crisis to crisis, requiring endless bailouts, while concentrating most of the world's wealth in a tiny number of hands, wiping out species after species, and, immanently, rendering large swathes of the planet uninhabitable.

The only plausible explanation is that the economic textbooks are wrong. Global financial markets aren't really ways of directing resources towards future benefit. They aren't even really markets. They are power arrangements, which mainly operate by colluding with Governments to extract rents, largely, by creating public and private debt. In these areas, the public and private sector become so closely entwined that it's difficult to even distinguish them.

For instance, the crisis has made clear that Governments with their own currencies are perfectly capable of creating money at will, simply by getting the Central Bank to buy bonds from the Treasury. This can either be done directly, or via the contrivance of selling them first to the finance sector and then buying them back.

So, it follows, the same resources now devoted to keeping destructive industries afloat could simply be redirected to do the opposite. There is no reason not to allow fossil fuel, air travel, and much of current construction to simply collapse for lack of subsidy; redirecting the money instead to green projects, retraining, and a basic citizen's income.

Radical Democracy

The only way to guarantee humans are protected from future catastrophe then is to ensure a dramatic shift of power relations. Do we expect Governments to just go right ahead and implement this? Obviously not.

Governments are ultimately answerable to their citizens, and one thing citizens clearly don't want, is to go back to how things were before. A recent survey found only 9% of British citizens want to return to life as it was pre-COVID-19. We can be certain there will never again be such reliance on air travel or commuting. And it's unlikely citizens will ever again blindly accept 'there's just no money' as an argument for failing to invest or to help the poor. The magic money tree was found, after all, this April.

Dramatic decisions will need to be made. Assuming that those currently running key institutions don't actually want the earth to become largely uninhabitable, but are simply trying to avoid responsibility, or indeed, are trapped inside machines of their own making, we argue that the logical thing for them to do is to leave the key decisions to citizens, informed by the best available scientific advice.

Citizens' Assemblies locally, nationally and globally should be convened as soon as possible to figure out how to convert the kind of ideas we've outlined here into a raft of rapid, effective actions. Citizens would be chosen at random, like a jury, informed by experts and — since the COVID-19 burst into our lives — haven't we suddenly remembered the importance of them?

Deliberating together, citizens should be empowered to decide the route, post-COVID-19. Should huge, pro-globalisation infrastructure plans e.g. new runways, be shelved, permanently? Should there be a frequent flyer levy, so that those still travelling by air pay proportionately for their travel? Should universal income be set at a high level, or a low one? What about universal services?

Citizens' Assemblies can decide these questions and more — questions that society hitherto has tended to duck, in a way that will ensure that ordinary citizens shape our future course.

Far too many have died of COVID-19. We can't think of a better way to memorialise them, than to create a world where that kind of emergency, in this case climatic, are made far less likely. A better world, that we can choose together. But to do so we need to first break the power of our current, catastrophic, form of long-term economic planning, and substitute one that, for the first time in human history, is genuinely democratic.

34. Preface to Jason Hickel's *Less is More*: A Vision Informed by Our Shared Vulnerability, and by Our Solidarity [2020]

Kofi Klu and Rupert Read praise Hickel's new work, *Less is More*, for both a profound and inventive critique of existing society, and an affirmative vision of the world which might be won if the aims of Extinction Rebellion, and adjoining groups throughout the Global South, succeed in averting climate and ecological collapse. This is the preferred version by the authors, as opposed to the edited version which appeared in *Less is More*.

We're delighted and honoured to have been asked to preface this important new book of Jason Hickel's. For this book offers *multiple* incisive new ways of thinking about what we need if we are to *prevent* the ruin of our climate, *roll back* the ongoing sixth mass extinction, and *avert societal collapse.* And such plurality -- a raft of intersecting and overlapping (and mutually reinforcing) ideas from history, economics, anthropology, philosophy, science, and more -- is what it is going to take, to inform an effective emergency-response that could achieve those eye-wateringly demanding objectives.

Extinction Rebellion [XR] is sometimes criticised for having demands that are (too) hard to achieve. But it's important to be clear about what XR is not: XR is not an all-purpose way of fixing our adrift civilisation. Rather: XR is the smoke-alarm. XR is the non-violent cutting edge of what Hickel calls the "emergency brake". Once the truth has been told and acted on*,* once the brake has begun to be applied, then we have to figure out together as a society, as citizens, just *how* we change everything to create a better society that works for people and planet.

XR — and society's and Government's needful response to us — is a recognition of emergency. And now of course, there is a new emergency in relation to which humanity can emerge, a pandemic emergency which is a product of ecological destruction and of the profound recklessness of 'globalisation'. Consider our collective response to the coronavirus crisis once we recognised this recklessness and became determined to do better: it amounts to a *protective contraction* of the economy, for the sake of life. This is a hopeful sign. It *prefigures* what Jason Hickel calls for in this book...

This new planetary emergency which joins us together in a mass shared vulnerability will be the basis for the next wave of XR – XR 2.0, as it might be termed -- in the following sense: together, we need to figure out how we are to live post-corona. But that figuring out will be thoroughly informed by our collective brush with death. This is particularly true of the global North, where many of us have managed to live for decades in a state of false complacency, under the illusion that our techno-science had mastered the world. In the global South, many people have had much more experience of extreme vulnerability and close-at-hand mortality. But even in the global South, in parts of which, at the time of writing ,coronavirus (after starting in the North) is just starting to hit hard, the shared simultaneity of this crisis is something fairly new.

Corona is being taken pretty seriously precisely *because* of its having fallen most heavily first upon the global North. The wake-up call it embodies needs so badly to be heard, because the climate emergency

too is simultaneous -- and yet threatens the global South *much* worse. *This* simultaneity, this common crisis with differentiated responsibilities, is enabling many people to consider more seriously the real political threat that in practice it manifests: of worsening environmental racism and of hidden agendas of eco-fascism in some quarters. These are agendas to pit various groups against each other (and also against diverse forms of Life). They require solidarity in response. If corona is teaching us something about solidarity in action, then that is a real hope in this dangerous hour.

Jason Hickel's book offers great ideas for what lies on the other side of this emergency. For how we can build something better out of the wreckage of what is. The coronavirus crisis has made it evident that if Governments are determined enough and driven enough by circumstances — and by the will of their peoples — then they can do things that they have been calling impossible for years: a citizens' income, forgiveness of debts, nationalisations where necessary: you name it. Jason sets out here in these pages how something similar but even bigger could characterise our way of exiting from the inanities and insanities of 'growthism': how we could build a better more equal society which had far less impact upon our ecosystems and made people happier. There is a sense in which we really can have it all. A simpler way.

As we noted above, XR is sometimes accused of having 'unrealistic' demands. But, as you will see when you read it, this book offers hope by showing that the kind of demands that XR has are *achieveable*. They *are* possible. All it would take is enough vision: of a restored Earth, a more regenerative culture, a better life together. The corona crisis has shown us all who the key workers are, worldwide: our medics, our food-growers, our distributors, and so on. If we refocused society around need rather than artificially-created wants — Jason sets out powerfully how distorted our lives are by advertising, reminding us that basically that is all that titans such as Facebook and Google are — we could recalibrate a world where together we could become more satisfied, and less separated.

We need to make this change. We all know this. We cannot wait. We have to *change systems* if we are to stop the growth juggernaut from barrelling over us all. As XR's greatest supporter, Greta Thunberg, most memorably put it, speaking earlier this year to global 'elites': "We are at the beginning of a mass extinction and all you can talk about is money and fairy tales of endless economic growth. How dare you!" We have to change systems not for any ideological reason, but simply because the emergency demands it. Much like food rationing during World War Two in countries such as the UK: that was nothing to do with socialism, and everything to do with survival. Yet it did make society more equal, and did make people more healthy. There is hope here again of achieving a beautiful coincidence: of the things we need to do to survive being actually the same as the things we need to do to have better lives.

In the early chapters of this book, Jason tells a terrifying true story of the history of capitalism. It's so grim that one might want to shy away. But we need to *look*. We need to face the truth, to face up to the historico-economic reality underlying the reality of the climatic and ecological devastation we are enduring. When Jason tells us all the hard truth that "GDP-growth is an index of the welfare of capital [and nothing more]", we need to listen.

One of our favourite moments in this book is where Jason points out that, if we in this society are inclined to always imagine more technological innovations as the way to solve our problems, then why don't we equally always imagine more *social* innovations too? It shows a great poverty of imagination to stop with capitalism, to assume that it is the only game in town. No! We are creative beings. We can imagine bigger than that. We can innovate in all *sorts* of ways. The Citizens' Assemblies that XR calls for, to find a human way beyond the interlocking emergencies we face, will need to be ready not just to look for potential solutions based in finance capital and business as we know them, but to look beyond these too. Jason Hickel helps us all to do such looking. He doesn't provide the answer; but he does clearly provide the *possibility* of an answer, and the promise that there may be more, if we are prepared to ask, and to look, and determined in fact to do so.

As rebels against extinction, we don't assert that the blueprint this book sets out is the right one. But we do assert categorically that it provides a kind of proof that there is nothing unrealistic about what we are asking for. On the contrary: if one is really wiling to face reality, there is nothing more unrealistic than the fantasy of continuing the status quo much longer. And thankfully, the corona crisis appears to have largely put an end to that fantasy anyway.

Two spectres haunt the world: the spectre of climate-and-eco-driven collapse, *and* the equal and opposite spectre of a rising up that would equalise and cancel out the first spectre. This second spectre — this apparition that is the last thing hold-out elites want to see, even though they virtually all know that we are right — is the promise of Extinction Rebellion, and the many movements in the global South that predated it and run alongside it, and the school climate strikers.

If collapse occurs, it is likely to occur first in the parts of the world that have done least to cause it: in parts of the global South. Our vulnerability - to corona and climate alike - is shared, and yet not equal; it is far more present, to those with the least power to resist it. The increasing brutally violent repression of the more impoverished, underprivileged and marginalised sections of some Global South populations by state and non-state security forces during lockdown enforcements, without meaningful poverty alleviation or other adequate social welfare provisions reaching the most needy, is driving many to their own independent self-organizational and self-empowering acts of defiantly rebellious community self-defence, with growing prospects of massively escalating civil disobedience in its various forms of popular grassroots creativity. Interesting times…

That is why some of the most urgent needs being expressed to our Extinction Rebellion Internationalist Solidarity Network (XRISN) by our Global South partner-networks, from the indigenous and other Communities of Resistance they are engaged with, are for joint 'glocally interconnected' actions of community self-empowerment by way of building alternative deliberative organs of bottom-up governance; in order to effect together harmonious planet-repairing endeavours of more just, equitable and transformative changemaking, from grassroots People's Assemblies through to Global Citizens Assemblies. For the realization is growing stronger in the Global South, including within its diasporan communities in the Global North, that the ecological and other huge debts owed to the colonially dispossessed peoples of the Majority World cannot be paid in simply the even more harmful GDP-growth ways of planet-destructive development and maldevelopment – ways so well-critiqued in this

book -- but rather in much more healing forms of Planetary Repair that will equitably ensure Reparatory Justice, wholistic wellbeing and happiness to all!

At least, that is our hope and our solidaristic aim. If there is one aspect of this book we are prefacing that we would take issue with, perhaps it would be that Jason, like so many others, still doesn't spend much of his time looking into the abyss of: what if, in the end, we fail. XR is succeeding so far because an increasing people are finally willing to face their fears, their despair even, about (the likelihood of) collapse — and to commit to doing something big about it. YOU, reader, could help that process. Join the growing direct honesty about the trajectory our societies are on, toward collapse. And then join the rebellion against that pseudo-destiny, our current path toward mass self-destruction.

If one agrees with Jason Hickel's vision in this book, one has a profound responsibility to act accordingly. To achieve that vision -- and to avert the alternative.

And that necessarily involves radical action to transform the status quo rapidly, in ways that go beyond the capacity of normal politics.

That is why XR is more needed now than ever. The post-corona moment may be humanity's last chance to learn from our shared vulnerability so as to create and realise a vision of the far more equal and far more sustain-able world that is our only possible way of preventing emergency from becoming nemesis.

Jason's book interprets the world quite brilliantly. He's asked us to write this Preface, so that you will join him and us now, in changing it.

Rebels for life, rebelling for life;

Rupert Read and Kofi Klu. England, April 2020.

35. Let's gauge firms' real CO2 footprints [2020]

Roc Sandford and Rupert Read call for a realistic measuring of firms' GHG emissions, and outline a way of doing so which is significantly more accurate – and more damning – that that currently employed in corporate circles. This article first appeared in *Breakingviews* by *Reuters*.

Greenhouse gas jargon has become a common part of corporate life. Even the most detached executive will have an idea of so-called Scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions in their carbon footprint. But the current way these metrics are compiled is too generous.

Scopes 1 and 2 are now widely reported. Scope 1 quantifies greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions linked to operations under a firm's ownership and control. Scope 2 refers to emissions embodied in bought-in electricity. Both are useful data points, yet when oil companies publish ambitions to become carbon neutral, these tend to represent the limit of their ambitions. Their offer is effectively that at some time around 2050 – when it will already be too late – their oil will be produced in a carbon-limited fashion. It won't be their affair what is done with it.

Scope 3 addresses the pointed blanking of this mammoth in the room. It includes the GHG emissions from supply chains and the ultimate consumption and disposal of whatever is produced by drivers and others. There is less corporate appetite to disclose Scope 3 emissions than Scopes 1 and 2, probably fuelled by the fact that Scope 3 emissions are often 90% of the three combined.

It's true that there are methodological questions implicit in Scope 3 calculations. The carbon residing outside supply chains and use-cases, such as that embodied in traded assets, is a particular issue. Professor Richard Murphy proposes calling these emissions Scope 4.

Four scopes may sound like more than enough. There are, however, at least two more mammoths in this crowded space.

Imagine an oil company which reduces production but continues lobbying unabated – through direct employment of lobbyists; membership of trade bodies; revolving doors and secondment for ministers, special advisers and civil servants; and party funding. Each such practice helps thwart the necessary global policy response to the climate emergency by undermining ambitions to deter emissions, stick to the modest remaining carbon budget for a Paris-compliant outcome and provide a just transition for workers displaced.

As such, the oil company we picture would still have a massive carbon footprint, because it would still be helping to hustle billions to the risk of painful and violent death. This footprint we capture as Scope 5 – enterprise lobbying.

But that's not all. Let's say a quality newspaper were to endorse in its coverage and advertising a high-carbon lifestyle. Think of the dozens of pages of adverts for cruises and foreign holidays, all of which imply a huge footprint. This we capture as Scope 6 – the power of brands to create, define, inspire and amplify energy consumerism, the lethal public appetite to consume embodied carbon.

As with Scopes 1 to 4, there are methodological questions. Like pre-existing versions, Scopes 5 and 6 could be hard to quantify, even though the likes of InfluenceMap and others do glorious work in anatomising the immense harm of the denialist lobbying effort. Our proposed Scope 5 stands on the shoulders of these giants.

We can sum enterprise expenditure on lobbying and apply a non-linear multiplier function to account for the excess societal value destroyed. Regarding Scope 6, we can multiply advertising spend, public relations, corporate sponsorships in sport and culture and so on by a function calculated to account for its effectiveness in exterminating life. After all, were such spending ineffective, few firms would do it.

Meanwhile, Scopes 5 and 6 could be reversed to create benign incentives. A car company might lobby against the road-building programme envisaged in the recent UK budget after being directed to by enlightened pensioners and savers who constitute their beneficial owners. Initiatives such as "Make My Money Matter" are making these voices heard.

Such a company might then have net-negative Scopes 5 and perhaps 6 to set against their still positive but diminishing Scopes 1 to 4. This might, in the time it takes to transition the enterprise to zero emissions, procure greater access to capital and a continuing social licence to operate. A turnaround in Scopes 5 and 6 could deliver competitive advantage, augment brand value and avert the corporate extinction which awaits so many enterprises in the 1.5 degrees economy.

Measuring scopes is valuable, but you must also act. The extra ones we propose incentivise corporations to reject an unnecessary calamity which is a failure not of engineering or economics, but of politics. The latter, as American philosopher John Dewey once remarked, is nothing but the shadow cast on society by big business. Scopes 5 and 6 disrupt that shadow.

36. The Need for a 'Moderate Flank' in Climate Activism [2021]

Joseph Eastoe and Rupert Read discuss the limits of XR and why a 'moderate flank,' with broader public appeal, is not needed to capitalize on the shift in public opinion XR has created – and achieve real changes in climate and ecological policy. This article first appeared in *Byline Times*.

'Environmental' awareness has exploded in recent years.

A previously marginalised movement and an under-acknowledged debate was at last thrust to the forefront through Greta Thunberg and her 'Fridays For Future' and the Extinction Rebellion (XR) group.

The crucial feature about these new movements is the way in which they were designed to utilise extra-legal action. In the case of the school climate strikes, this has been systematic non-attendance at school. For XR, it takes the form of mass civil disobedience on the streets.

Drawing on successful precedents from history – including how the emergence of radical feminists in the 1960s made reformist feminism seem mild and unobjectionable – XR was explicitly designed as a 'radical flank' to the existing environmental movement. It was designed to be bolder and to go further than it. The goals of the existing movement would be made to seem more modest and reasonable, by way of being 'outflanked' by XR.

In this way, even if it was not successful in achieving its own aims, it would help legitimise the movement at large. In this sense, XR's radical nature was a tactical choice.

And whatever else can be said about it, XR has galvanised a social awakening about a set of issues that will determine whether or not a decent future is possible for us; issues which were not receiving the attention they urgently deserve.

On the other hand, XR has progressively taken more risks and 'escalated' it actions and, as a result, it has become more polarising and unpopular. Radicalism may have some tactical advantages, but it also comes with a price. According to a 2021 YouGov poll, only 17% of those surveyed have a positive opinion of XR, whereas 41% have a negative opinion. Just two years ago, the movement's approval rating was 36% – more than double the current figure. It is therefore important to remember that radical flank effects can be negative as well as positive – they can discredit the entire cause, as well as making more room for it.

Such divisiveness around XR is by no means to be equated with divisiveness over environmental issues. Indeed, there is now overwhelming support from the British public to deal with dangerous anthropogenic climate change and the ecological crisis – partly as a result of the agenda-shift that XR has successfully helped to achieve.

In the largest poll to date conducted on climate change in 2021, 81% of those surveyed in Britain said that climate chance was a global emergency – the highest proportion in the world. Moreover, 67% of those surveyed want the UK to lead the world when it comes to tackling the issue. However, only 35% of those surveyed believe that Prime Minister Boris Johnson can be trusted to make the right decisions on climate change and the environment, with a majority (57%) believing that he cannot. 27% of those surveyed believe that the UK is doing enough to curtail carbon emissions, with a majority (51%) believing that the UK is not doing enough.

This is strong evidence that XR's basic strategy has worked. The significant rise in these figures in the past few years – particularly in the UK, the country in which XR was founded and has been strongest – was achieved in large part **by** XR changing the conversation.

The Limits of XR's Growth

One thing that XR is certainly right about it is that time is running out to do something about the climate emergency. Thus, maximising the efficacy of eco-activism is essential.

An important correlation between the achievement of a social movement's goal is with the size of its bottom-up base of support. Is there scope for XR to grow or has it hit its ceiling?

Since autumn 2019 – when the Canning Town debacle cast a shadow over XR from which it is yet to recover – the movement has shrunk. It has achieved some remarkable things since then, including stopping the Murdoch press for a day; and having some juries and magistrates find rebels not guilty despite the facts of their cases not being in dispute.

However, going forward, it is likely that XR has fundamentally achieved what it can as a radical flank – moving the centre of gravity of public opinion on climate and nature. Very large numbers of the population who are not already active in XR don't show any likelihood to get involved in an organisation they perceive as too radical. This difficulty has been underscored by the further escalation of tactics understandably pursued recently, such as moving to window-breaking.

To maximise the number of people who would be willing to demand more from the Government, our case is that there now needs to be a more 'moderate flank'. To capitalise on its success as a radical flank, new organisations are required that don't labour under XR's reputational difficulties and which are capable of attracting significantly wider public appeal.

There is also a more pragmatic, political dimension to this. When XR makes demands, regardless of how reasonable they are, it is too easy for those in power to play politics. Faced with an organisation that only has a 17% approval rating demanding environmental reform, it becomes easy for the Government to demonise it and to ignore its demands. Imagine roughly the same demands coming from an organisation with a 50% approval rating, or 60%. Or 70%. Would the Government simply be able to ignore them then?

Thus, the moderate flank of environmental activism is required for both bottom-up and top-down reasons.

The former would maximise the number of activists willing to involve themselves in eco-activism – and, in our view, this would need to focus specifically on involving parents. As is observed in the book *Parents for a Future*: "By focusing our minds on the young vulnerable generation that we lavish our love upon, [we] will appeal not only to anyone who's ever had children, but to anyone who understands the duty of care that parenthood entails".

The top-down motivation for a moderate flank is that the acceptance of demands from eco-activists would be more appealing to politicians if it comes from an organisation that has high levels of approval

amongst citizens. We must ensure that we do not lose the millions of voices crying out for change by only giving them the option of XR – or nothing.

We must ensure that we eliminate any excuses from those in power to not do what is necessary.

The 'moderate flank' concept was co-created by Rupert Read and Adam Woodhall. They will be developing this proposal in the coming weeks and months. 'Parents for a Future' by Rupert Read is available now.

37. The Politics of Paradox [2021]

'"Imagine electoral politics not just affected by the agenda-shifting caused by the radical flank, but materially-altered by the presence inside it of a growing 'moderate' flank." Rupert Read and Laura Baldwin explore the need for a 'moderate flank' in climate activism, as exemplified by the Greens Climate Activist Network (GreensCAN).' – Green World

Extinction Rebellion (XR) has had a permanent transformational effect on the place of climate and nature in British politics and society, and beyond. XR will continue to play an important role: radical non-violent direct action (NVDA) is effective at pressuring government and corporations, but so far the movement hasn't mobilised masses of people as is required to force systemic change. The percentage of the population it has mobilised is far less than that recommended by social change theorist Erica Chenoweth. XR has successfully set the scene, which now needs filling by a substantially larger mobilisation. We explore here how this might be achieved.

Political parties that are serious about learning from the pandemic and about going into an increasingly climate-damaged future with an adequate programme should learn from XR's [and Greta's] success: from the power of radical truth-telling, of authentic emotion relating to the broader audience (and existing policy-makers), of properly-targeted non-violent direction. Relative to XR, they should consider becoming *moderate* flanks. This is the opposite of the Burning Pink 'strategy'; instead, what we are envisaging is political parties themselves (starting with subsets thereof) doing a vanilla-ised version of what XR did. This applies to the Lib Dems; it applies to Labour; it might potentially apply to some extent even to the Conservatives, as the 2020s come to manifest more starkly the phenomena of climate decline. (Watch here for Claire Perry O'Neill's forthcoming book. And check out Hallam's article on the Conservative case for XR, the best thing he has done since co-creating XR. The appeal to conservatives should be an appeal to their wishing to conserve things; whereas, unbridled neo-liberalism is ripping everything up and harrying us over a cliff. It is anti-conservative.)

But the point we are making applies most certainly and obviously and profoundly to the Green Party. The Greens are different to the other three parties: it has never got anywhere near power in the UK, and almost certainly won't under the first past the post (FPTP) system, at least not within this decade (which is the relevant time-scale now for the climate crisis). Whilst the Lib Dems are currently almost an irrelevance (though that might change, after their remarkable success in Chesham and Amersham), they were in power only six years ago, and have risen from very low ebbs before.

The Green Party has not succeeded in the UK in its historic mission: of coming to power and saving the world through the ballot box. Recognising this truth will bring more authentic power to green voices; the way to come into our full power now as change-agents, paradoxically, is to recognise our near-impotence thus far.

The Green Party needs to return to its roots: to its mission as a truth-teller about ecology, to its philosophical basis, incorporating the need for justified, targeted NVDA that makes sense to most of the public. That can be electorally successful too!

The Green Party, in other words, needs to radicalise, and step up to deal head-on with the terrifying reality of our time, of how we are over the brink. But, relative to XR (and there is a significant overlap of personnel between the two), this would be the Green Party functioning as a *moderate* flank. This is the strategy envisaged by the new 'Greens Climate Activist Network' (GreensCAN) that we've co-launched with Teal and former Deputy Leader Shahrar Ali. GreensCAN has attracted support from Jonathon Porritt, former MEP Molly Scott Cato, GPEx Campaigns rep Britta Goodman, Baroness Jenny Jones, as well as a laudatory mention from Caroline Lucas.

And in this way the moderate flank can be a force in party politics; and this offers some hope, because part of what is needed if there is to be any chance of transformation is likely to be: change via electoral politics (as Sunrise has pulled off in the USA). Imagine electoral politics not just affected by the agenda-shifting caused by the radical flank (This effect was obvious in the May 2019 elections in the UK, with the Green Party clearly reaping benefits in the local and European elections from XR's April Rebellion...the #GreenWave was partly an accidental gift of the radical flank effect that at that point XR had successfully undertaken; the same may be true to some extent of the impressive Green performance in the May 2021 elections), but materially-altered by the presence inside it of a growing 'moderate' flank, for example, an ecology/nature/climate/future movement like GreensCAN, which looks vanilla compared to XR but which radicalises actually-existing party politics in exactly the way that our time calls for.

It is in GreensCAN's ethos to undertake actions that do not alienate; GreensCAN actions are and will be carefully calibrated to build support. GreensCAN sees a key part of its role as being to bring the power of radical truth-telling into party politics itself – including about the way that the COPs this year will fail us; and even about the way that the Green Party itself has, tragically, not succeeded in its historic and vital mission. Such deeply-unexpected authenticity is potentially transformative.

The politics of our time is and will be a politics of paradox. To have any chance of *succeeding* in unleashing the power of righteous rage and love that could correct our course, we need to come clean

about our *failure* to achieve power in time. To make the most of XR's success, we need to be more moderate (especially in terms of methods) than them. To get somewhere, we need to give up our aspirations to ideological purity and our desire to scream "We told you so!" in favour of a caring, inclusive alliance-building. That requires a willingness to be ecumenical, and 'moderate'.

The primary audience for the present piece is English-speaking countries across the world, which are roughly the countries where XR (and, in the USA, the Sunrise Movement, which has had real success influencing the programme of the Democrats, now in government) have most shown the efficacy of a radical flank. But XR's effect has also been wider; and there are other movements too of a radical flank nature that have opened up the space for the conversation that this piece has taken on and seeks to initiate and widen in other countries.

Take Germany, for (an important) example: important, partly because the Greens might win the Chancellorship there this year. There – unlike in the UK – Fridays For Future includes some adults; there – unlike in the UK – one or two individual youth climate strikers have achieved a level of media-cut-through which has brought them almost onto a par with Greta herself in terms of domestic influence; and there – again, unlike in the UK – there is already a substantial, influential parents' movement (most found in many Parents for A Future chapters). Furthermore, Germany has not only a thoughtful and impactful wing of XR, but also Ende Gelande, a radical direct action movement that hits hard especially at the German coal industry. We would foresee and argue for an expansion in size and ambition of the German parents' movement, and also an upping of ambition in the zone of workplace-based activism there. All in the context of aiming for a broader realisation that political 'leaders' are not rising to the rescue: that the post-Covid reset is largely not being undertaken transformatively, that the climate-critical COP is poised to fail us badly. In Germany, the Green Party is on the brink of federal power as we write. But the German Greens are dominated by 'realos'. Germany needs a movement orders of magnitude larger than XR and Ende Gelande, in order to bend the political agenda seriously in the direction of genuine and sufficient climate action. That movement is likely to function as a radical flank to Die Grünen. (In the electoral sphere, the new 'Klima list' may function as a needed radical flank to the German Green Party, but as a moderate flank to XR and Ende Gelande. In other words: it would be splendid if there were something like GreensCAN launched in Germany, too…)

GreensCAN is being careful not to undertake actions likely to annoy the substantial number of potential citizen-activists who will not resonate with the strategy of escalation being pursued by some of XR and in Roger Hallam-inspired radical flanks to XR. Through undertaking only actions that can make sense to many people, GreensCAN thus has the potential to mobilise a larger phalanx to engage in NVDA. This is what the moderate flank can do: get us nearer having 3.5 per cent of the population actually being willing to get on board with civil disobedience.

If this article sparks interest within you then, please do come onboard and help shape GreensCAN into an effective movement. You can contact us via email: greens.activists@gmail.com. Do come along to one or both of the online sessions in the morning and evening of 14 July, during which we will co-create the next wave of action.

Part Five: The COVID-19 Crisis and Beyond

38. 'Test and Trace' is a Dangerous Omnishambles [2020]

Tom Scott and Rupert Read discuss the utterly shambolic nature of the Government's 'Test and Trace' initiative, suggesting that local governments should be empowered to initiate lockdowns, and other measures to counteract the pandemic, given the lack of leadership – and worse – from Westminster. This article originally appeared in *Byline Times*.

Trust is invaluable in a public health emergency. This was what our source stressed above all. As someone who has been involved in the effort to fight the Coronavirus nationally for the past few months, they are deeply dismayed by what they have seen. This article first appeared in *Byline Times*.

The UK may soon have the highest death rate from the Coronavirus in the world. Through the Dominic Cummings affair, the Government has forfeited what public trust it had left. This should underline the importance of the UK Government devolving power to command and control structures empowered – wherever the pandemic is not being suppressed and in particular where it is growing – to bring in trusted new suppression measures in those places.

As *Byline Times* has reported previously, a particularly disastrous Government decision was made on 12 March: to end contact-tracing. Since then, the question has always been: when will it finally be restarted and will it be restarted in an effective way?

Minutes from the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) meeting of 1 May show that Government scientists have advised that for the contact-tracing system to be effective, "at least 80% of contacts of an index case would need to be contacted", that they would need to start self-isolating preferably within 48 hours, and that "a high level of adherence to requests to isolate is needed".

However, people hired to work as contact-tracers are reporting that they are receiving almost no training and that the electronic system they are supposed to be using is not functioning properly.

One described in *The Guardian* how the so-called "self-led" training course undertaken by contact-tracers – which supposedly lasts seven-and-a-half hours – can be completed in 90 minutes and consists of "generic dos and don'ts". Trainers are told to refer anything they are not sure about to their supervisor, but are left unsupervised for much of the time. "I learned more about my job from watching the news than I did from those who were supposed to supervise me," they said. "I still did not feel qualified to do it."

This contact-tracer decided to quit their job in view of the general chaos and confusion, saying that none of his colleagues "have any faith that we're properly set up to fight any increase in infection rate from this pandemic".

Another told *Sky News*: "I've just done my training with a company sub-contracted by Serco. We didn't even have training – they tell you to read a pdf, and then do an online quiz. All of which takes an hour tops… On the phones tomorrow."

"We're just kind of sat there doing absolutely nothing for the majority of the day," one contact-tracer told *BBC News*. "Right now, I'm just sat scrolling through Netflix. A lot of people are chilling on games."

Confidence in the system was not helped by comments from the Deputy Chief Medical Officer Jenny Harries at the Downing Street Coronavirus briefing the day before the lockdown was lifted. Asked how people would be able to tell that they were being contacted by a genuine contact-tracer, she replied: "It will be very obvious. These are professionally trained individuals. It will be evident from how they speak."

To many, this seemed like an open invitation to fraudsters, who are extremely good at sounding "professionally trained" and have probably done more in the way of 'professional training' than reading a pdf supplied by Serco.

But then Serco itself is an extraordinary choice of partner for the contact-tracing operation, which involves handling large volumes of sensitive personal data. The company has an appalling track record of mismanagement of other Government contracts – for refugee detention centres, for instance, and for the electronic tagging of prisoners. The latter case involved fraud and false accounting on a massive scale, for which the company was fined £19.2 million in 2019.

From the perspective of our source, for the Government to seek to create a trusted contact-tracing system by employing a failed profit-hungry corporation is a bit like seeking to put out a fire by throwing the nearest liquid to hand on it – even if that liquid is flammable.

Serco's record of involvement in health-related contracts is disastrous. In 2006, it was put in charge of the out-of-hours GP service in Cornwall. After numerous complaints from the public and reports from whistleblowers, the contract was suspended early. A 2013 parliamentary report by the Public Accounts Committee found that the company had presided over the falsification of data, failure to meet national standards and a bullying culture.

Serco, along with accountancy firm Deloitte (a generous benefactor to the Conservative Party over the years) is also involved in the testing aspect of 'Test and Trace', which appears equally shambolic – and these contracts are being awarded without being put out to competitive tender, under powers assumed by the Government in January.

All of this would be scandalous at the best of times. But a global pandemic is the worst of times for the Government to be handing the vital task of contact-tracing to discredited corporations.

In doing so, the Government has largely ignored the genuine expertise in contact-tracing that already exists in public health teams at a local and regional level, to the dismay of local councils and public

health directorates. These are the bodies that should be at the heart of a "community shield" that can genuinely project the public from the Coronavirus, where we live.

Our source stressed that having a centralised contact-tracing system is likely to misfire in England, where there are profound regional variations. For instance, if a Londoner phones up a village-dweller in county Durham to tell them that they ought to self-isolate because they have been in contact with someone who has tested positive for the virus, how likely is that village-dweller to obey? Arguably, they would be far more likely to do so, if the caller knew the place they lived in and spoke with an accent more familiar to them.

The pandemic is revealing the downside of having a country as centralised as the UK. If England is to move out of lockdown with real responsiveness to local outbreaks, then what is desperately needed is for localities or regions to have the power to re-lockdown (or take whatever other emergency measures are appropriate).

Local power, empowered local government, and an integrated-services approach is required. It shouldn't be up to local government alone to make such decisions, but local government in conjunction with key local service-providers. Outside places such as Manchester – which has a strong metro mayor – they said there is now profound confusion as to who is actually responsible for controlling a local outbreak. They said there needs to be clarity about who has the power to re-lockdown whenever that is necessary, and that power should be appropriately decentralised.

If such decisions require central Government say-so, across most of England, then we are in a disastrous situation. Responses will be too slow and we will be dependent upon a level of Government – in Westminster – which has manifestly failed to keep us safe so far. We can't count on the Government to be either effective and quick enough or to prioritise lives over political considerations.

The whole system should have been stress-tested during lockdown, according to our source, to determine whether the contact-tracing system works well enough to re-open society and the economy further.

It appears that the Government is instead operating on a strategy of pushing for economic re-opening while simply crossing its fingers that this will happen without the rate of transmission and case numbers rising again. This is utterly unprecautionary.

It is up to citizens to seek to assert local control, to act responsibly – and to apply all possible pressure in an effort to change policy. In the absence of an effective Government, it is up to us collectively to seek to lead – as we have done throughout.

39. The Hard Facts Of COVID-19 Demolish the UK Government's Deadly 'Herd Immunity' Strategy [2020]

Tara Greaves and Rupert Read outline the facts behind the Government's herd immunity strategy: from the beginning, Johnson's administration was prepared to go ahead with herd immunity, no matter the cost in human life, with up to a million deaths cited in government documents. This article first appeared in *Byline Times*.

"Facts are stubborn things, but statistics are pliable" - Mark Twain.

While toilet rolls, pasta and flour may have been hard to come by during the Coronavirus crisis, there has never been a shortage of statistics.

The Government's unreliable stats on personal protective equipment (counting two gloves as two items of PPE, for instance), on tests (counting tests sent out and multiple tests on the same person towards its 100,000 a day target, which has probably not once yet been achieved), and on deaths (failing, for instance, to include excess deaths) are legion.

But one set of stats was particularly dangerous. They were widely used in certain quarters to try to suggest that the Government's policy – explicit for a while, and since then, after outcry, implicit – of 'herd immunity' might be on the right track.

'Herd immunity' refers to the state whereby enough members of a population have acquired immunity to a disease so that it cannot spread within that group – suggested to be between 60-80% for COVID-19 or about 40-50 million people in the UK.

Neither peer-reviewed nor published in any scientific journal but released via a PR agency, a study from Oxford University's Evolutionary Ecology of Infectious Disease Group spawned a raft of headlines in March declaring that as much as half of the UK population had already been infected with the Coronavirus. It also led to some speculation that physical distancing measures introduced a few days prior could be unnecessary.

However, a new report by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) reveals that, as was strongly suspected at the time, the Oxford study was way off. Its figures were far from true — in fact, antibody tests conducted on a random sample of households suggest that fewer than 7% of people in England have been infected with the virus.

This in turn suggests that the draft Oxford survey should probably have never have been in the public domain because, had it been relied upon, the death toll in this country – while horrific enough – would have been much greater.

So why was the study released? And why did the Government delay taking any precautionary action for so long, despite substantial evidence in favour of this even from its own advisors?

In six words: to try to boost the economy.

The Roots of 'Herd Immunity'

For circumstantial evidence to support that general hypothesis, one only needs to look at the timeline of delays – delays that experts believe cost "tens of thousands of lives".

For much of March, the Government resolutely stuck to the 'delay and contain' phases of managing the crisis, despite strong warnings from its two main modelling teams that this could lead to a "catastrophic number of people being killed".

The Prime Minister first publically floated the idea of 'herd immunity' on 5 March on ITV's *This Morning.* When asked whether delaying the Coronavirus was about 'flattening the curve' of the pandemic, he said: "That's where a lot of debate has been and one of the theories is that perhaps you could take it on the chin, take it all in one go and allow the disease, as it were, to move through the population, without taking as many draconian measures."

But, even before this, the Prime Minister had already laid the groundwork for the idea much earlier, in a revealing post-Brexit trade speech on 3 February, in which he suggested that the UK would remain open for business during the Coronavirus because "at that moment humanity needs some Government somewhere that is willing at least to make the case powerfully for freedom of exchange". Johnson was looking for economic advantage in the new pandemic context.

This is appears to be the 'smoking gun', evidencing how 'herd immunity' was the Government's intention no matter what the collateral damage.

The Government's Chief Scientific Advisor Sir Patrick Vallance and other senior aides certainly appeared to think it was on the cards. But, after expert and public push-back and incredulity at the policy, the Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock contradicted them by claiming it was "not our goal or policy".

As other countries – and indeed individuals and many organisations across the UK – proceeded with precaution, putting in place measures to limit public interactions, events such as the Cheltenham Festival (which 250,000 people attended over four days) and the All-England Badminton Championships (with 300 players and more than 25,000 spectators from around the world, including China, Malaysia, Denmark, Taiwan, India and Indonesia) were allowed to go ahead.

It was only on 23 March that Boris Johnson finally announced lockdown measures.

A few days later, the Oxford Study was released.

Why was the Oxford Study Released?

Using seemingly plausible assumptions, in one of three scenarios, the Oxford study estimated that, if the Coronavirus had started being transmitted 38 days before the first confirmed death, 68% of the UK population would have been infected by 19 March.

While it came with a disclaimer that it was not the final version of the paper and subject to change, it was this statistic that hit the headlines – appearing dramatically to vindicate the Government's unofficial 'herd immunity' plan.

It drew almost immediate criticism from experts working in the field. Paul Hunter, Professor in Medicine at the University of East Anglia, said that "it should not be given much credibility and should certainly not influence choice of strategies for mitigating the spread of COVID-19".

It is difficult not to question why the study was released (by a PR agency with links to several Government departments) and whether the aim was to influence the choice of strategies.

While other statistical surveys by various organisations have pitched immunity between 5% and 26% throughout the crisis, according to the ONS report: "Of those individuals providing blood samples, 6.78% (unweighted) tested positive for antibodies to COVID-19 (95% confidence interval: 5.21% to 8.64%); this equates to around one in 15 people."

Even now, the Government seems to be putting the battered economy ahead of the public by prematurely easing lockdown measures when many experts are saying it is too soon.

The Failed Swedish Model

To catch a glimpse of what life would have been like had the UK continued with 'business as usual' for longer, one can look at Sweden.

Swedish authorities placed the responsibility on individuals and businesses by issuing guidelines about how to 'flatten the curve' and kept the country largely open.

Despite some early praise for continuing with life as normal, Sweden briefly held the title of the highest per capita rates of the Coronavirus deaths in the world, taking over from the UK – and has seen more than four times as many deaths as its neighbours. Its authorities are now finally admitting that the strategy has been a very costly one.

More than that, reports suggest that it is still nowhere near 'herd immunity', with only 7.3% of people in Stockholm having developed the antibodies needed to fight the disease by late April.

For Precautionary Strategies

We don't even yet know whether 'herd immunity' – whether acquired through antibodies or a vaccine – will work for COVID-19. The virus may mutate too quickly for it to develop in any meaningful sense.

We still don't know for certain whether, having had it once, a person definitely cannot catch the virus again. Or whether there will be any lasting health implications for those that survive it, although there is growing evidence that various organs, including the brain, could be damaged.

The precautionary case is strengthened by each of these points: it is a case for suppression/elimination, and against the reckless willingness to infect most of the population.

The irony of course is that the Government's attempts to prioritise GDP are actually very short-termist. The best way to ensure ongoing economic activity is via the kind of tough suppression/elimination methods pursued in countries such as New Zealand and Taiwan. So, even on its own terms, the Government's policies have failed completely.

So fixated is it on economic considerations no matter what the potential human cost that it results in, that the Government is going to let betting shops re-open before it lets places of worship re-open for individual prayer.

Those who wrote at the time in praise of the Oxford study ought to now publicly to eat their words and apologise – for having risked the lives of tens of thousands of people.

But we aren't holding our breath.

40. Communities Need to Take Contact Tracing into their Own Hands [2020]

Lynn Bjerke and Rupert Read offer a proposal for localised, community-led contact tracing which avoids both government bureaucracy and useless technological 'fixes,' citing examples in Wales and Sheffield organized by retired doctors and community activists. This article first appeared in *Byline Times*.

The UK's "world class" tracing scheme, designed to prevent a second deadly Coronavirus wave, is unlikely to work at full speed until September or October.

The NHS smartphone-based tracking app is a failure. We now have no tech help with contact tracing for a few months at least, and no guarantees even then.

With the Government's efforts failing, how could community-based methods work instead? As lockdown is lifted, a bottom-up contact tracing effort may be crucial in preventing a resurgence of mass deaths when new outbreaks occur.

The independent SAGE group strongly contested Government data relating to the first full week of its 'Test, Trace and Isolate' programme, saying that it was "deeply misleading as it relates only to the 5,407 individuals who were reached by contact tracers and ignores the 75% of new cases that were simply not found". We haven't even begun to grapple with the number of asymptomatic individuals who are out spreading the virus.

New data suggests that 40% of infected people show no symptoms. Taking asymptomatic cases into account, this would suggest that 25% of symptomatic cases are currently being traced, but potentially

only 15% of all Coronavirus-infected individuals. Or far fewer. The Government figures are for contacts “agreeing” to isolate, with no mention of audit, follow-up, support or assessment of how many actually isolated.

Local Focus

Social stigma, potential loss of income, and disengagement with health efforts are all challenges to an effective test and trace initiative. But, a local volunteer-based system could give the moral and psychological support to people forced to isolate. If they live alone, this is crucial.

Even living with others has additional stresses of disagreements, confinement and lack of private space. Additional support through grocery shopping, prescription pick-up, dog walking and regular utility bill-paying, due to loss of income, are also required. When these things complement contact-tracing, it is most likely to be taken up and work.

Engagement and cooperation are critical to driving action and change within communities. Community-based contract tracing can overcome these challenges by engaging with longstanding local groups. These groups can draw upon their already trusted status in their communities, identify people who need testing and help support potential cases during isolation or quarantine periods.

In Wales, the area of Ceredigion was able to achieve radical suppression of viral spread by taking early action and employing a community-based contact tracing programme. Ceredigion experienced only 15 to 25% the rate of cases as neighbouring regions. It was a small programme, but a very hopeful sign of what can be achieved.

In Sheffield, a group of retired doctors, public health physicians and community activists have established a community-based contact tracing programme model that they are sharing with others. Critically, this local contact tracing group was able to tap into local support networks to help neighbours who needed to isolate. The group is currently approaching other community groups using social media and trying to find symptomatic cases before testing. The goal is to work with hard-to-reach groups whilst encouraging testing as well.

Community Contract Tracing’s Time Has Come

Supporting local connections between community and public health officers is essential to rebuilding effective local responses to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Community members need daily support if they are isolating. The Sheffield programme has shown this is possible.

The experience of mutual aid groups and similar that have sprung up over the past three months shows that there is significant local resource ready to assist. But longstanding community groups which have the trust of locals are our most crucial resource and can only be tapped into by local people. Unlike the Government’s corporate national plan, local knowledge and presence is hugely valuable for a successful track and trace effort.

We asked our source, who is deeply involved in the national effort to deal with COVID-19, to review our proposals for how to solve the crisis, as modelled by the Sheffield group, circumventing the failing Government effort.

They noted potential issues, such as concerns around data protection, but believes they can be solved – for example, via a memorandum of understanding between the parties involved. Our source further recommended that our proposal would be enriched by working with traditional groups that are familiar with these kinds of issues and situations such as the Red Cross.

These plans should be made a reality throughout the UK. If local authorities can't or won't get involved, communities should move ahead anyway. There is an opportunity now to work together to bring more community-based contact tracing into being. If local – not to mention national – Government is not interested in working with us, then we must act now to save ourselves.

41. Documents Reveal Government and NERVTAG *Breached Own Scientific Risk Assessment Guidance* in COVID-19 Failure [2020]

Following an investigation, Nafeez Ahmed and Rupert Read outline how the UK's COVID-19 planning, from the outset, broke the Government's own stated guidance on applying the precautionary principle vis-à-vis risks to 'human, animal or plant health.' This article was first published in *Byline Times.*

An official Government document published in January 2020 confirms that, by delaying action in response to the Coronavirus, officials breached their own internal cross-government standards concerning risks to "human, animal or plant health".

In the wake of an investigation by the *Sunday Times*, followed by an unprecedented Government response, the release of this document raises a number of urgent new questions about the Government's COVID-19 strategy.

"The Government followed scientific advice at all times", according to its written response to the *Sunday Times*, which added that "claiming that there was scientific consensus on [the threat] is just wrong".

However, according to the Government's own internal guidance on assessing risks to health, the demand for scientific consensus or certainty sets the bar too high. In a situation where there is a potentially severe threat, the 'precautionary principle' indicates the need for a determination to act rapidly in taking far-reaching precautions against a threat.

The document is a guidance note published on 17 January 2020 by the Regulatory Policy Committee (RPC), a non-departmental public body (a body that has a role in the processes of the Government but is not a Government department) sponsored by the Government's Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. The RPC supports the Government in ensuring that evidence underpinning policy-making is robust, particularly in terms of how regulation can impact business.

According to the RPC document, its goal is "to provide policy-makers and analysts" across Government with "a concise tool to assist them in presenting evidence that will be relevant to the department's application of the precautionary principle and is appropriate to their specific circumstances."

This document states from the outset that:

"… the purpose of the precautionary principle is to *allow a policy decision to be made notwithstanding scientific uncertainty about the nature and extent of the risk*.

The… precautionary principle should be applied only when:

there is good reason to believe that *harmful effects may occur to human, animal or plant health, or to the environment*; and

the level of scientific uncertainty about the consequences or likelihoods is *such that risk cannot be assessed with sufficient confidence to inform decision-making*."

In other words, the document provided clear advice to the Government about the conditions that necessitate precautionary planning – conditions which clearly applied (and in many respects still apply) to the Coronavirus.

The document went on to specify that:

"The [Inter-departmental Liaison Group on Risk Assessment] guidance acknowledges that '…the precautionary principle was originally framed in the context of preventing environmental harm… [however] *it is now widely accepted as applying broadly where there is threat of harm to human, animal or plant health*…' (p. 5). The principle is therefore applicable across a wide range of policy areas."

The document proceeded to set out that invoking the precautionary principle is appropriate on the following key counts: If there are "irreversible harmful effects" – this condition was clearly satisfied by the potential risk of mass deaths, especially given the risk of overwhelming the health service and early evidence of high fatality rates for vulnerable elderly and ill people.

If "the state of evidence is such that [the Government] is unlikely to be able to assess the risk and likelihood of harm or to assess it sufficiently before it is too late to intervene effectively" – this condition was clearly satisfied in the case of the unprecedented speed of COVID-19's spread, its relatively high R0 (reproduction number: how many people a single person is likely to infect), and the

related unknowns about the Coronavirus' nature (including its *not* being a flu, the illness which the Government's extant pandemic-preparedness was primarily structured around).

In short, the guidance note demonstrates that the Government did not need to follow a scientific consensus on COVID-19 to take strong, early action. Its claim that inaction was justified by the lack of such a consensus is spurious.

Precautionary Planning

The Government's own advice established a mandate to take precautionary action in the absence of scientific consensus or certainty due to the emerging "good evidence" of harmful effects on human health.

Despite this, emerging evidence demonstrates that the Government did not give serious attention to precautionary planning, raising the question:

1. Why was the precautionary principle not followed, in relation to a potentially massive threat of an unprecedented kind, despite a clear mandate for doing so based on advice from the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy's Regulatory Policy Committee?

   Although it had every reason to, there is no evidence that the Government gave serious consideration to the precautionary principle between January and March.

   The only way that this could be proven to be false is if the Government releases the minutes of meetings by the Scientific Advisory Group on Emergencies (SAGE) and its various sub-groups.

2. Will the Government release the minutes of its scientific advisory group meetings, in the national interest, so that the public can assess its claim to have followed 'scientific advice' at all times?

   The Government's claim that it followed "scientific advice" at all times cannot be properly assessed given that the identity of the scientists advising the Government remains secret.

   However, it is known that the Government was being advised by different types of scientists – many of them not public health experts (nor experts on precaution). The question, then, is: which science was the Government following? Was it 'behavioural science' or public health advice? Was it epidemiologists modelling the epidemic or economists modelling GDP growth impacts? Did it include advice from medics and scientists drawing on data from China or Italy? Did it include precaution-informed risk analysis?

   It is impossible to determine how the Government was weighing up 'scientific advice' without citizens having full view across its scientific advisors.

3. Will the Government release the names of all the scientists who have been advising it?

   The Government's own advice on the precautionary principle raises specific questions about its response to the *Sunday Times*' analysis of its failure to raise the threat level. The *Sunday*

Times reported that, by 21 February, "the virus had already infected 76,000 people, had caused 2,300 deaths in China and was taking a foothold in Europe, with Italy recording 51 cases and two deaths the following day. Nonetheless NERVTAG, one of the key Government advisory committees, decided to keep the threat level at 'moderate'."

The Government responded to this as follows: "This is a misrepresentation of what the threat level is. This is about the current public health danger – and on February 21, when the UK had about a dozen confirmed cases, out of a population of over 66 million, the actual threat to individuals was moderate. In terms of the potential threat, the Government was clear – on 10 February the Secretary of State declared that "the incidence or transmission of novel Coronavirus constituted a serious and imminent threat to public health".

But the Government response obscures the time-lags involved with the exponential growth of a virus like this. While on 21 February, the immediate, current threat to individuals was indeed not high, the *Sunday Times* report raised the deeper question of whether the NERVTAG risk assessment process was even fit for purpose if it failed to provide the Government with a broadly precautionary understanding of the severe risks potentially likely to unfold in the following weeks.

Threat Levels and Risk Assessments

In a further statement following the Government's official response to the *Sunday Times*, the Chair of NERVTAG, Professor Peter Hornby, issued his own statement justifying the 'moderate' NERVTAG threat level:

"The PHE [Public Health England]/NERVTAG risk assessment judgment on 21 February has been misunderstood.

The risk assessment tool was developed and used by PHE/NERVTAG for assessing the current, not future risk, of emerging viruses. It is dynamic, and the assessment on the 21st February was that the risk of COVID-19 was moderate 'at this time'. The minutes of that meeting are clear that members thought this risk was likely to increase. Also, it is not intended for use as a trigger for actions during a pandemic. To the best of my knowledge, it did not lead to any action/inaction on the part of Government and the suggestion that it contributed to fatal delays is misleading."

But an official Government document describing NERVAG's own operations appears to contradict Professor Hornby's statement. The Public Health England document published in November 2015 confirms that NERVTAG's role is advise the Government "with scientific risk assessment and mitigation advice on the threat posed by new and emerging respiratory viruses and on options for their management."

NERVTAG's scientific risk assessment analysis is, therefore, specifically designed to advise the Government on what actions should be followed to manage new, emerging, as yet not fully-present threats. The document further clarifies: "The scope of the group includes new and emerging

respiratory virus threats to human health including strains of influenza virus (regardless of origin), and other respiratory viruses with potential to cause epidemic or pandemic illness, or severe illness in a smaller number of cases."

The question, then, is: which science was the Government following? Was it 'behavioural science' or public health advice? Was it epidemiologists modelling the epidemic or economists modelling GDP growth impacts?

In other words, NERVTAG's explicit purpose was to provide a scientific risk assessment of both current and future risks and options for threat management, based on examining an emerging virus' "potential to cause epidemic or pandemic illness". Especially one which, as was already clear from China, could cause severe illness and death in not-a-small number of cases.

The document suggests that NERVTAG's remit is not about providing a limited verdict on the 'threat to individuals', but to identify the potential risk of a wider epidemic or pandemic.

An Abuse of Process?

Given this context, the Government and Professor Hornby's face-saving responses, if true, appear to prove that the 'moderate' threat level issued in February may well have been an abuse of NERVTAG's own processes and specific remit.

The implication is that the reason the Government can say it was following 'scientific advice' in deciding not to take earlier action is because NERVTAG's 'scientific advice', for reasons unknown, was not being prepared according to NERVTAG's own Code of Practice. In turn, this raises the following question:

4. Why, when issuing its threat level on 21 February, was NERVTAG not following its own Code of Practice in providing the Government with a proper scientific and precautionary risk assessment of the emerging Coronavirus' "potential to cause epidemic or pandemic illness" relevant to "options for their management" – why was the alleged focus limited to "current" risk and "not intended for use as a trigger for actions during a pandemic"?

It is surprising that NERVTAG appears not to have been sticking to its own Code of Practice. One possible explanation, suggested by previous *Byline Times*investigations is, that some scientists were self-censoring about what was potentially in store knowing that this was not what Boris Johnson's Government wanted to hear – committed as it already was to keeping Britain 'open for business' even through a pandemic; one expressed in its 'herd immunity' policy.

All these questions have been put to the Government but it failed to provide any meaningful or specific responses to any of our questions.

42. Principles for a Post-Covid Britain [2021]

Victor Anderson, Jason Hickel, and Rupert Read outline the principles of a post-COVID society. With the reemergence of a feeling of community and care amidst the crisis, the opportunity presented by such a radical social moment must be seized to restructure Britain for the world which lies ahead. *This article was first published in The Ecologist*.

The coronavirus crisis is a massive shot across the bows of the world as we know it. In response we can no longer afford to take timid steps. Bold, concerted action is the only responsible way forward.

We, along with the signatories listed below, therefore propose the following principles for a post-pandemic United Kingdom, with examples of how they might be implemented.

These are, we believe, principles that all can agree to, principles emerging from the emergency itself. This is not a shopping list of policies, about which there will be contention; this is a sketch of the deep necessary change that our time calls for, an agenda we can all share:

Causes

There will be many more crises like this one if we don't change course. This pandemic is linked to habitat destruction, creating opportunities for the spread of the virus.

Economic globalisation has made economies very vulnerable to disruption in supply chains, and air travel has enabled Covid-19 to spread at unprecedented lightning speed. Extreme inequality has meant that large sections of the population lack the resilience to properly cope with crisis conditions, whilst austerity policies of cuts to public services have undermined the capacity of health services and local government to respond.

Despite pandemics and epidemics appearing many times on official risk registers, the short-termism of most politics has prevented adequate precautions from being put in place by governments. The climate emergency has already caused droughts, floods, and forest fires, and these can be expected to worsen as more and more carbon is put into the atmosphere.

Decarbonisation

All plans to rebuild the economy after the coronavirus crisis must be designed to simultaneously decarbonize the economy and restore ecosystems and biodiversity.

We must use this as an opportunity to build a different kind of economy - an economy that prioritises human wellbeing and ecological stability. If we ‘solve’ the coronavirus crisis and its economic impacts by worsening the longer emergency of the ecological crisis (including the climate emergency), we will have achieved less than nothing.

There is no point leaving the frying pan of the covid crisis only to jump into the flames of ecological breakdown.

The postponement of this year's big international climate and biodiversity COP conferences is a worrying sign of the possible postponement of ecological concern – at a time when we simply cannot afford any delays.

Work

We must change how we travel and work, without resorting to bailouts for high-carbon industries. As we emerge from this terrible corona crisis, let's bake-in and expand the incidental benefit felt by some of reduced air pollution, reduced levels of motor and air traffic, more quiet, more leisure time, more space for nature.

Transport in future must not rely on the private car, let alone on air travel. High-carbon companies wanting to return to business should not be helped by government assistance. Employees who wish to continue working from home should be actively facilitated to do so.

Care

The virus crisis has helped us realise what's important, what really matters in our lives. It has shown us (in neighbours supporting each other, in mutual-aid groups, in hundreds of thousands volunteering for the NHS) how we care about each other.

Similarly, the crisis has revealed which jobs really matter, and which matter much less. It can nolonger be acceptable for City traders to earn hundreds of times more than nurses or shelf-stackers. Our collective priorities have changed.

Action

We support calls for a full independent public inquiry on the handling of the Covid-19 pandemic in the UK. Plans for how we emerge from the corona crisis should have a precautionary dimension: let's plan on suppressing or eliminating future corona outbreaks, let's be prepared to nip future pandemics in the bud — *and* to prevent further climate breakdown and mass extinction so far as possible.

We need radical targets for the reduction of climate-deadly greenhouse gas-pollution and of biodiversity-destruction.

We have seen in the Covid-crisis how incredibly fast and radically governments and the public can act, and we have seen the damage wrought by not asking quickly enough. We have implemented measures that would have been deemed 'politically impossible' a few months ago. That kind and scale of action is precisely what is needed in order to safeguard us against future emergencies.

Assemblies

Citizens assemblies must be convened to chart the bold way forward, on the basis of these principles. The UK Government, like virtually every other government across the world, was elected in a different world – the pre-coronavirus world. Governments should turn to citizens to decide how, together, we'll make the post-coronavirus world.

Citizens' Assemblies are more representative of the population than elected bodies, whilst not being subject to the pressure to win elections or please funders. Citizens' assemblies locally, nationally *and globally* should be convened as soon as possible to figure out *how* to convert these principles into a raft of rapid, deep action-points.

Citizens, chosen at random (like a jury) informed by experts, and deliberating together, should be empowered to come up with a plan for the path forward, post-corona. For example: should pro-globalisation infrastructure plans (e.g. new runways) be shelved, permanently? Should there be a frequent flyer levy so that those still travelling by air the most pay by far the most? Should there be a high basic income, or a low one (or none at all)?

Should there be universal basic services? Should there be preparations for food-rationing (as a precautionary measure)? Should agroecology be massively publicly subsidised? Should industrial animal agriculture be systematically reduced?

Citizens assemblies can investigate these questions and more, questions that society hitherto has tended to duck, in a way that will enable the buy-in of all to a radically repurposed future.

Collective

People tend to assume that they themselves hold values that are good for the community, values that are caring, but that others' values are more selfish. But the amazing human response to the corona crisis – especially in our communities and in the caring professions -- has exploded that myth of selfishness.

So the time is now to create a better society in the face of this emergency, a society reflecting those values that we all share. This 'unmanifesto' is a set of principles that all can agree to, going beyond party politics.

These principles are based on the experience of the emergency we are currently going through and the more fundamental, longer, unavoidable emergencies that underlie it. This terrible, precious moment of the world economy being paused is a unique opportunity, possibly the last opportunity, to get things right. Let's not blow it.

Let's seize this moment to bring the nations and the generations together. We must protect the old through the coronavirus crisis; and protect the young through a future which, if the vision sketched here is realised, can even yet be better than ever.

So let's not blow this chance. This should be a collective effort, with the private sector, philanthropists, charities, unions, governments and all of us playing a role. We aspire for this 'unmanifesto' to be implemented by governments; for governments to have the wisdom to create Citizens Assemblies that will chart a way forward, on the basis of the principles we've laid out.

But the rest of us should not wait passively for governments to act. We must do what we can to realise these principles starting now: in our communities and workplaces, in our counties and on our streets, in our nations and in our homes.

Signatories

Prof. Rupert Read, University of East Anglia and author, *This Civilization is Finished*

Prof. Jason Hickel, Goldsmith's, University of London and author, *The Divide: A Brief Guide to Global Inequality and its Solutions*

Prof. Victor Anderson, Anglia Ruskin University

Dr. Caroline Lucas MP

Sir Jonathon Porritt, former Director, The Sustainable Development Commission

Prof. Richard Murphy, author, *The Courageous State: Rethinking Economics, Society and the Role of Government*

Prof. David Graeber, author, *Bullshit Jobs*

Baroness Natalie Bennett

Baroness Jenny Jones

Prof. Julia Steinberger, IPCC author

Helena Norberg-Hodge, author, *Ancient Futures*.

43. Does globalisation make 'Covidisation' inevitable? [2021]

Aseem Shrivastava and Rupert Read discuss, at length, the intrinsic connection between COVID-19 and globalization – a connection with holds true irrespective of the origin of the virus, zoonotic or, even worse, man-made. Shrivastava and Read regard this piece as a fruitful product of East-West dialogue. This article first appeared in *Brave New World*.

"The COVID-19 pandemic is yet another reminder, added to the rapidly growing archive of historical reminders, that in a human-dominated world, in which our human activities represent aggressive, damaging, and unbalanced interactions with nature, we will increasingly provoke new disease emergences. *We remain at risk for the foreseeable future. COVID-19 is among the most vivid wake-up*

calls in over a century. It should force us to begin to think in earnest and collectively about living in more thoughtful and creative harmony with nature, even as we plan for nature's inevitable, and always unexpected, surprises." (Emphasis added)

– **Dr. Anthony Fauci et al *Cell***, 2020

For more than a generation of economic globalisation, to turn the old adage on its head, it seemed to many that 'wealth is health'. In the bargain, as everything, including health, came seemingly to rest on the willing shoulders of money, huge fortunes were made and all but universally sought, in what has come to be called an 'aspirational world'. Although it might equally be called a world of emptiness, one without aspiration to anything *worthwhile*.

For, in a grim reminder of the fact that we have in effect been encouraged to escape reality itself in the name of 'freedom', the Coronavirus pandemic has been here during the last year to rap us on our knuckles, as you might reprimand little children, that health is still wealth, that, as the great John Ruskin had it, *life* is the true wealth, and that little has actually been *well* with us and the world all this time that the big fortunes were being made.

We live in an age soaked in propaganda. Could reality actually be much simpler than we are being led to think nowadays? In other words, is it not little more than obvious common sense that many pathogens have been, are being and will be summarily unseated by the aggressive, expansionary forces of competitive globalisation from their ancient homes in remote ecosystems – in mountain caves, near polar icecaps, or in the tropical rainforests, or even perhaps the seabeds of oceans? And that this is, at bottom, the main driving cause of this pandemic and of those many more to come? That if we are to find a lasting answer to the devastating waves of pandemics which are otherwise upon us, we must identify this cause and root it out from our way of life?

Let us note upfront that it is possible that Covid-19 is **actually the product of a lab-leak from Wuhan** in China. This highly-**disturbing possibility** also casts a very dim light on our hubristic civilisation's tacit tech-mad assumption that we can act as if we are gods, without fear of blowback. In other words: If this were to turn out to be the true origin of this deadly coronavirus, *our basic diagnosis would be unaffected.* This piece is about the profound danger we have exposed ourselves to by turning against nature, and by turning tech and economics into pseudo-gods. It concerns how our globalizing civilization systematically creates the kind of risk that we have suffered grievously from over the last year. *Whether by the lack of humility implicit in constructing deadly viruses in labs, or by the lack of humility explicit in destroying ecosystems, artificializing much of the Earth and wreaking climate-havoc*, we are manifesting a mode of being that is incompatible with safety and with the richness of long species life. And the global civilization we have created is fundamentally fragile. It moves and multiplies deadly trouble around itself at the speed of jet-planes.

Our fundamental contention in this piece is that you have to choose: **you can have a relatively secure, relocalised world, or you can have pandemics.** in a world of sporadic restless 'growth'. What you can't have is our growthist, technophilic, materialistic, economically-globalised system *and* be relatively free of the risk of pandemics.

Nobody likes their homes disturbed and so, having been evicted from their permanent habitats, microbes looking for new homes in unfamiliar places, the world's metropolises and its human inhabitants only being the most recent discovery of theirs. Even the animals whose bodies gave them transient succour are slain for human food in large numbers, especially nowadays, when there is a thriving global market for meats of an ever more diverse kind. Thus, 'spillovers' of what are called 'zoonotic' viruses are becoming increasingly more frequent than they used to be in a slower, less globalised world of moderate material aspirations, involving far less disturbance to remote ecosystems.

Could things not be as simple as this? After all, every creature, even a virus that comes alive only in a living cellular environment, longs to thrive by reproducing itself. Removed forcibly from its customary habitat, it would surely look for a new home, much like indigenous people uprooted by the same modernising juggernaut ultimately throng our congested cities in the hope of finding a new roof over their heads. The current pandemic may be part of the rapidly growing price of the unsparingly triumphalist modernisation of the world.

If all this is true, should we not reject outright any talk of a 'post-Covid' world? At least so long as the unregulated forces of competitive globalisation are ruling the world in the age of corporate empires, each of whom is keen to carve out the riches of the earth for their own exclusive exploitation – before any of their rivals get to the jackpot? For, so long as competitive commercial aggression supported by myopic technological utopianism remains the dominant way of human life on earth, one can expect microbes otherwise remote from or harmless to humans to turn pathogenic and generate far-flung consequences for global society and human health. The lurking perils would not be allayed even if this particular coronavirus pandemic ends.

Let us look deeper. Let us take in together some of the evidence. Let us seek truly to take it in…

Man-made causes of the pandemic

First, let us look at the destruction of habitats around the earth in the global age. The forces of international competition are the glory of professional economists who advise governments around the world. Such competition is upheld for the virtues of productivity, efficiency, and growth which fire the world's economies – employment generation being the usual political pretext for such reductionist advice.

What is not considered by economists is the growing violence to the earth's ecologies entailed by the routine processes of modern, competitive economic growth. The expansion and intensification of agriculture, the race-to-the-bottom extraction of mineral resources for manufacturing, and the growth of infrastructure (such as the construction of roads, dams, airports, ports, and power plants) all involve deforestation and habitat destruction on a large scale. Since 1990, a forested area of **178 million hectares**, seven times the size of Britain, has been lost to global economic growth. This is more than 4% of the forested area of the earth.

Some economists, such as Partha Dasgupta, have begun taking note of the routine, unsustainable destruction of nature as a result of economic growth. **Such environmental accounting as they engage in is risky**: to treat nature itself as if it were a kind of capital is arguably just a novel form of the degradation that we are calling out in this essay. The value of nature is profoundly misunderstood and mischaracterized if we tot it up in pounds and pennies. But take their false coin for true, for a moment: even on their own terms, such accountings clearly show up the great illusion that global economic growth has now become. Man-made capital not only cannot replace nature, it is suicidally predatory on it. **Data** from UNEP demonstrates that the global stock of 'natural capital' per capita has fallen by a staggeringly precipitous 40% since the early 1990s, while produced capital has doubled and human capital has grown by only 13% since then.

Rapid deforestation has not only led to enormous loss of biodiversity, flora and fauna, it has also brought (as we shall see) humanity into much closer contact with unfamiliar new pathogens carried by the smaller creatures, such as rodents, rats and bats, moved by or left behind by habitat destruction and modification. This is a big source of zoonosis, since many unknown microbes, with which human immune systems are unfamiliar from evolution have come into close contact with human society for the very first time. Credible **research** demonstrates that changes in land-use, including deforestation and the modification of natural habitats, are responsible for almost half of emerging zoonoses.

One scientific **assessment** "found that the populations of animals hosting zoonotic diseases were up to 2.5 times bigger in degraded places, and that the proportion of species that carry these pathogens increased by up to 70%" in comparison with undamaged ecosystems.

During the last one year of the Coronavirus pandemic, there have been a series of **warnings** from the UN and WHO that the world must tackle not just the health and economic symptoms of the pandemic but their root causes in the destruction and modification of natural habitats and remote ecosystems. In the opinion of experts, the Covid-19 pandemic is an "SOS signal for the human enterprise." "Even more deadly disease outbreaks [are] likely unless nature [is] protected."

A recent study published in **Nature** points out that "global changes in the mode and the intensity of land use are creating expanding hazardous interfaces between people, livestock and wildlife reservoirs of zoonotic disease." "As people go in and, for example, turn a forest into farmland, what they're doing inadvertently is making it more likely for them to be in contact with an animal that carries disease," says **David Redding**, of the ZSL Institute of Zoology in London. "The greatest zoonotic threats arise where natural areas have been converted to croplands, pastures and urban areas." In his view, "the reason for species such as rodents and bats simultaneously thriving in ecosystems damaged by humans and also hosting the most pathogens is probably because they are small, mobile, adaptable and produce lots of offspring rapidly." Agricultural and urban lands are predicted to expand in the coming decades. This will call for the reinforcement of disease monitoring and healthcare especially in areas going through fundamental disturbances to habitats and ecosystems, since they are ever more likely to have "animals that could be hosting harmful pathogens."

Rabies, leptospirosis, anthrax, lyme disease, zika, SARS, MERS, yellow fever, dengue, HIV, Ebola, Chikungunya and coronaviruses are all zoonotic viruses. The familiar flu, as well as malaria and the bubonic plague originated in zoonosis too, though in centuries past. According to **UNEP**, three-quarters of emerging infectious diseases which affect the health of humanity now originate in animals. So we can scarcely be indifferent to 'spillovers' whose origin lies in deforestation and habitat destruction or degradation.

Second, let us consider the rapid growth of movement of people and goods around the world in the global era. The **number** of international air passenger trips more than doubled from 2 to 4.7 billion in just the period from 2004 and 2019, till the pandemic interrupted the growth. Thanks to globalisation and the consequent growth in the speed, frequency, and volume of international travel across great distances of the earth, viruses – not just zoonotic – have exploded in our time.

Where transmission from human to human is possible, a virus can speedily spread across our globalised world. Globalisation, with the ever-growing and rapidmovement of people and goods over great distances, has made the diffusion of diseases across the world an everyday anxiety. The current pandemic is an ample demonstration of the ease with which a dangerous infection can spread in an interconnected, global world through sometimes mysterious vectors and pathways. Within hours, a virus can travel from one continent to another. Those countries – such as Taiwan and South Korea – which imposed international travel restrictions early in the current pandemic have suffered orders of magnitude fewer deaths and Covid cases than those nations – such as Belgium/Netherlands and Spain (with roughly the same population respectively) which did not introduce such controls early enough. Zoonoses are emerging at an unprecedented rate today. Much research is being conducted to address the anxiety of the possibility of a pandemic of globally catastrophic proportions, the likelihood of which grows by the day.

Third, there has been a tremendous growth of international animal trading with the advent of the latest phase of globalisation. Traditionally, it is true that in many cultures human communities have hunted wild animals for meat. Eating meat has often been an important source of protein in many subsistence diets across cultures. Everything from birds and fish to apes and reptiles have been hunted and eaten.

What has changed dramatically with the arrival of globalisation during the last few generations is the growth in animal trade – for profit – across the world, a good proportion of which is illegal and unregulated, thus not in adherence to international food safety standards.

Especially illustrative is the case of pangolins, sought for their scales, used in traditional Asian medicine, as well as for their meat, a delicacy in some Asian and African communities. They have become among the most trafficked (and threatened) animals in the world. One of the possible pathways through which SARS-Cov-2 may have reached human populations is through pangolins.

Legal international trade in animals itself is over **$100 billion**. However, under the radar, the forces of globalisation have encouraged a growing, unregulated trade in diverse animals with serious public health consequences across international boundaries.

Fourth, scarcely secondary is the public health danger posed to human society through the industrial mass production of meat through animal farming and the slaughterhouses. Most of the meat consumed in the world today is factory-farmed. Animals are closely packed together, both when they are transported and when they are farmed. As **Michael Greger** (the author of *Bird Flu: A Virus of Our Own Hatching*) says, "the animals could use a little social distancing, too." They live under harsh and unsanitary conditions of shrunken space, and limited air and sunlight. The stress that animals go through, especially when they see their kin maltreated, removed from them or slaughtered before their eyes, weakens their immune systems. All this makes it easy for microbial infections to spread.

Compounding matters is the fact that animals and birds are selected for genetic traits. This means that those who are farmed are genetically all but identical, making it easy for a viral strain to spread fast across a group of animals or a flock of birds. "Livestock health is the weakest link in our global health chain," noted the **Food and Agriculture Organization** in a 2013 report.

Evolutionary biologist Rob Wallace underscores that "**big farms make big flu**." "Attempts to proactively change poultry and livestock production in the interests of stopping pathogen outbreaks can be met with severe resistance by governments beholden to their corporate sponsors. In effect, influenza, by virtue of its association with agribusiness, has some of the most powerful representatives available defending its interests in the halls of government. In covering up or downplaying outbreaks in an effort to protect quarterly profits, these institutions contribute to the viruses' evolutionary fortunes. The very biology of influenza is enmeshed with the political economy of the business of food." In other words, for pandemics to stop the world's food arrangements will have to undergo a serious change.

Fifth, let us further consider dietary habits in a globalised world. Diets are changing rapidly with globalisation. There is a growing demand for meat from large developing countries, especially India and China, as their middle classes get wealthier and wish to emulate the food habits of wealthier cultures. During the last half-century, global meat production and consumption have grown by an astonishing **260** percent.

Such a shift in global diets is not sustainable from a planetary resource and climate perspective. Scientists have repeatedly pointed out that avoiding meat and dairy products is the most effective way for us to reduce our footprints on the planet. A shift towards more meat in diets is also ecologically unwise from the vantage point of public health. It is widely understood among experts that meats which we consume regularly can become microbial carriers.

The synergy of causes of pandemics related to accelerating globalisation

What is common to all the causes behind growing pandemics discussed above is the brutally ruptured relationship between metropolitan humanity and the natural world, upon which the architecture of globalisation stands. It is particularly dangerous that the causes work in tandem. Thus, deforestation and degradation of ecosystems, by wiping out wildlife and buffer species and areas, expose humanity to precisely those microbial carrier species – such as rats and bats – which host pathogens alien and

hazardous to the human immune system. The speed and scale of globalisation makes the encounters between humanity and such pathogens all the more sudden and dangerous.

There is virtual unanimity among scientists and experts in a wide range of related fields that the pace of invasion of the natural world by the restless forces of global extraction and commerce are generating conditions which make it all but certain that humanity will continue to face escalating pandemics from known and (many) unknown microbes well into the future.

“We invade tropical forests and other wild landscapes, which harbour so many species of animals and plants – and within those creatures, so many unknown viruses,” writes **David Quammen**, author of *Spillover: Animal Infections and the Next Pandemic.* “We cut the trees; we kill the animals or cage them and send them to markets. We disrupt ecosystems, and we shake viruses loose from their natural hosts. When that happens, they need a new host. Often, we are it.”

Kate Jones, chair of ecology and biodiversity at University College, London, calls emerging animal-borne infectious diseases an “increasing and very significant threat to global health, security and economies”. The resulting transmission of disease from wildlife to humans, she says, is now “a hidden cost of human economic development. There are just so many more of us, in every environment. We are going into largely undisturbed places and being exposed more and more. We are creating habitats where viruses are transmitted more easily, and then we are surprised that we have new ones.” “We are researching how species in degraded habitats are likely to carry more viruses which can infect humans,” she says. “Simpler systems get an amplification effect. Destroy landscapes, and the species you are left with are the ones humans get the diseases from.”

“There are countless pathogens out there continuing to evolve which at some point could pose a threat to humans,” says **Eric Fevre**, chair of veterinary infectious diseases at the University of Liverpool’s Institute of Infection and Global Health. “The risk (of pathogens jumping from animals to humans) has always been there.”

“I am not at all surprised about the coronavirus outbreak,” he says. “The majority of pathogens are still to be discovered. We are at the very tip of the iceberg.”

Felicia Keesing, professor of biology at Bard College, New York, underscores that “when we erode biodiversity, we see a proliferation of the species most likely to transmit new diseases to us, but there’s also good evidence that those same species are the best hosts for existing diseases.”

Humans, says disease ecologist **Thomas Gillespie**, are creating the conditions for the spread of diseases by reducing the natural barriers between host animals – in which the virus is naturally circulating – and themselves. “We fully expect the arrival of pandemic influenza; we can expect large-scale human mortalities; we can expect other pathogens with other impacts. A disease like Ebola is not easily spread. But something with a mortality rate of Ebola spread by something like measles would be catastrophic,” Gillespie says. Wildlife everywhere is being put under more stress: “Major landscape changes are causing animals to lose habitats, which means species become crowded together and also

come into greater contact with humans. Species that survive change are now moving and mixing with different animals and with humans."

"The risks are greater now. They were always present and have been there for generations. It is our interactions with that risk which must be changed," says **Brian Bird**, a virologist at the University of California, Davis. "We are in an era now of chronic emergency," Bird says. "Diseases are more likely to travel further and faster than before, which means we must be faster in our responses. It needs investments, change in human behaviour, and it means we must listen to people at community levels."

Veteran primatologist, **Jane Goodall** blames the current pandemic on our ethically corrupt relationship to the natural world. "We have brought this on ourselves because of our absolute disrespect for animals and the environment," she said. "Our disrespect for wild animals and our disrespect for farmed animals has created this situation where disease can spill over to infect human beings."

Worse is yet to come

Finally, it is necessary to point out in an age of denialist solutionism that many so-called 'solutions' to major ecological challenges such as dangerous man-made climate change may greatly exacerbate the danger of growing pandemics, creating new problems, often without solutions.

To illustrate the point, let us consider the implications of changing patterns of energy use towards a more desirable ('green') mix. For nearly a generation now we have been told by experts that decarbonising the world economy is an imperative to prevent runaway climate change and protect organic life on earth. This implies the gradual phasing out and ultimately, the elimination of fossil fuels which today constitute over three-quarters of the world's energy use. It means that renewable forms of energy (solar, wind, sometimes water) and electricity generated without coal and oil must come to replace fossil fuels. The middle of the century is being targeted to achieve this substitution if the world is to keep to the limit of global warming by 1.5 degrees.

Renewable sources of energy will increasingly be relied upon. In other words, the production of electricity from them will be happening in ever greater proportions. The transmission advantages of fossil fuel power will have to be forsaken. The power generated will have to be stored in batteries which will be deployed at the point of end use. The global economy is ever more remote-controlled and battery-operated now. Everything from Elon Musk's electric vehicles to computers and smartphones will run on batteries. Growing amounts of lithium, nickel, cobalt, manganese, copper, graphite, and rare earths like titanium, molybdenum and vanadium are thus critical to the operations of a decarbonising global economy.

The destruction of remote habitats and ecosystems is a necessary consequence of the ceaseless search for these rare earths and metals. Terrestrial mining typically involves deforestation, water pollution and human rights abuses. Seabed mining is proposed as an allegedly environmentally sensitive alternative. The strong likelihood is, however, that it will serve not so much as an alternative, but an *additional* source of metals necessary for the working of batteries. Minerals on land, where they still exist, will be extracted to the maximum anyway.

According to researchers associated with the **US Geological Survey**, the deep sea, contains in countless polymetallic nodules more "critical" and rare earth metals, necessary for "green technology" applications, than all land reserves combined. Dozens of licenses for exploration of the seabed have already been issued by the **International Seabed Authority** (ISA), a UN body made up of 168 countries which, interestingly, both promotes and regulates deep-sea mining. Once underwater mining codes are approved in the near future, giant mining corporations will dive in and **"history's largest mining operation"** will begin.

To save the planet we had to destroy the planet

Interested are many new business ventures like DeepGreen **"whose primary interest in mining the ocean is saving the planet."** But: Such mining will devastate the fragile ecosystems of the dark, deep sea, which may never recover from the damage done by the ocean rovers and robotised tractors, many tonnes in weight, which will remorselessly plough the seabed in search of the new precious metals of the 21st century. Any number of environmental and other experts and critics have expressed their deep reservations about such a venture since it has the potential to damage forever the ecology of the planet, when you take account of the many finely balanced ecological functions of the oceans in the healthy functioning of the biosphere and how they may be endangered by the mining of the seabed. The deep seas, for instance, are vital, huge carbon sinks all too significant in a world facing climate breakdown.

To sum up this part of the discussion: the understandable desire to tackle desperately urgent climate crisis is *fuelling* forms of wider ecological devastation. Humanity's obsession with itself is taking here a peculiarly virulent form. To save ourselves from the self-imposed climate threat, we are apparently willing to take open-ended new risks of wilfully damaging our ecosystems – including even damaging their very capacity to act as natural carbon sinks…

And that's not all. Relevant to the discussion about an age of raging pandemics is the question of potential pathogens that might lurk on the seabed. The density of microbes in seawater is many million per millilitre, the reason why some scientists are trying to defend the seabed by arguing that many remedies for the treatment of human ailments might be hidden under the ocean floor. According to genetic scientist **Craig Venter**, "the chance of finding new antibiotics in the marine environment is high."

Most deep sea microbes, it is understood by scientists, are hosted by the very same metallic nodules that miners are keen to extract. Oceanographer **Jeff Drazen** says "When you lift them off the seafloor, you're removing a habitat that took 10 million years to grow." Disturbing such a primitive ecosystem, that too in the name of 'greening' the planet, is fraught with microbial dangers of the kind that are already causing mortal havoc in the terrestrial world. Microbes unseated from their accustomed marine habitat will surely look for new homes. If hadal trenches are also going to be disturbed from the peace of the millennia, who knows what new public health perils such a mining mega-adventure will inadvertently invite upon humanity.

A Covidised world?

Routine structural violations of ecological niches which constitute the root cause of pandemics are concomitant with the forces of competitive corporate globalisation. Such dangerous transgressions will not cease unless such globalisation is itself called off. We should *expect* a permanent growth and escalation in global pandemics to accompany globalisation of economic life.

Industrial modernity itself is responsible for the precarity of global public health consequent upon the new microbial perils it continues to provoke because of its structural disregard for the natural world. In his poorly read ***Hind Swaraj***, Mahatma Gandhi offered a damning critique of modernity, describing it as a "nine days wonder". He also wrote that "there are now diseases of which people never dreamt before, and an army of doctors is engaged in finding out their cures." In other words, he was well aware that diseases grew with modernity. Indeed, he wrote that modern civilisation was a "disease" in itself, though it is not "incurable" if wisdom is heeded.

It is very striking that in countries like the UK, which were **utterly egregious failures for the first 12 months of Covid**, a central aspect of their historic, epic fail was their profound unwillingness to face the reality of the impending virus and to change their practices in response to it. The UK Government, and most others in the world (such as Modi's India, which followed in its tracks), when it mattered most (i.e. especially in the first vital weeks of the pandemic, which countries like Taiwan, New Zealand, South Korea etc took full advantage of), failed chronically to restrict 'freedom' of movement at or within their borders, to close down economic activity, or to move to new norms of healthful self-protection. About the *only* things that the UK Government has done well in the entire period since January 2020 are to roll out vaccines (for its own citizens, not for others) and (recently) to make tests widely available. What is striking about these things is that they are (1) tech-based interventions, that are (2) designed to seek to return the economy to business-as-usual. The UK Government like too many others, has shown no interest in the things we have sought to highlight in this piece: in *life*, care and relationship, the health of and space for nature, the possibility of a new healthier paradigm, nor even in emergency measures to safeguard borders or to keep Covid-free places Covid-free.

This is very telling. It tells of the same attitude that characterizes most governments' attitudes towards nature and climate, and toward *civilisational* health and wisdom. Our Governments are largely interested only in using tech-fixes to keep the show on the road a while longer. Not in genuine sustainability and in what makes life worth living; not in what it would take to invest in the long-term longevity of the species; not in any kind of solidarity with non-human nature; not in anything demanding a deep rethink. In all such matters, imagination and political will are entirely missing.

To return then to our earlier theme: it is plainly false to say that global industrial modernity has not bred new diseases, that it has only discovered pre-existing ones. Throughout its history of several centuries, new diseases have evolved with the supposed 'conquest of nature'. With every breach of natural limits, especially in a world of accelerating globalisation, new diseases are being generated. "The risk of pandemics is increasing rapidly, with more than five new diseases emerging in people every year, any one of which has the potential to become pandemic," a **report** from a team of scientists working on biodiversity says. "It estimates there are more than 500,000 unknown viruses in

mammals and birds that could infect humans" in the near future as the destruction of the natural world proceeds faster.

We are now quite evidently in an "era of pandemics." They are likely to come in nightmarish waves of greater frequency and intensity unless ecological sanity miraculously prevails and the thinly disguised structural avarice which guides the global economic machine is recognised as a suicidal herd habit which must be brought to an end. This may sound like a dream – given the millions of changes and adjustment such a radical change in human affairs will involve. But the realisation of such a 'dream' is the only way out of the nightmares which otherwise stalk the present and the future of humanity. As the saying goes in public health, "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." At stake is civilisation itself.

This civilization is terminating itself. The only way we get to continue the adventure of civilization now is by transitioning to a radically new one. And that newness will have at its heart ancient wisdoms that we have periodically touched upon in this piece. The alternative to the nightmare sketched above, then, is a future in which the energy we use is genuinely renewable, but that **we choose to use less of it.**

Climate-damage and habitat-destruction are **massive probabilifiers of pandemics: the science on that**, as we showed earlier in this piece, is pretty unequivocal. You have to choose between having tech-fixated globalisation and having less pandemics. The reality of life, including political life, is the unavoidability, for mature human beings, of facing up to such choices.

Covid is not an "act of God" as many (including the **Government of India**, for instance) believe, in line with the dominant propaganda assumptions about the origins of the pandemic. It is, as Dr. **Anthony Fauci** himself says, a direct outcome of "aggressive, damaging, and unbalanced interactions with nature." It is, in other words, the result of human beings acting in one way or another, delusively, as if we were gods.

It is this cretinous recklessness and unseemly anthropocentric unwisdom which must be brought to an end, healing ourselves with the same policies and attitudes with which the wider natural world must be restored to health again. It is high time we woke up to the reality that we *are* nature too!

The health of humanity is directly dependent upon the health of nature. The health of nature IS the health of humans. Taking a unified approach to the mortal crisis of public health and the catastrophe that is being inflicted upon the rest of the natural world is the only ecologically wise attitude to adopt today. To avoid such wisdom is potentially suicidal for humanity.

To remind you of what we made explicit at the outset of this essay: we have been arguing here that you can have a world that cuts off most pandemics or you can have an economically globalised, artificialised, technophilic world, but you cannot have both. This diagnosis is just as true if the lableak hypothesis is proved/assumed than as it is if the nature-destruction hypothesis for the virus's origination is proved/assumed. The world has learnt over the last year the consequences of 'post-

truth' attitudes; this is why Trump was ejected, why Bolsonaro is in so much trouble, and Modi is no longer invincible.

The world has learnt a new respect for science, especially for the undeniable *facts* on which good science rests. But the very real possibility of the lab-leak hypothesis, in the context of its snarling denial by authorities in the medical world until recently, reminds us powerfully of the dangers of *scientism*, quite a different thing from science itself. It is scientism when the domain of all knowledge and wisdom is sought to be 'colonised' by science, its claims and possibilities greatly exaggerated for usually undisclosed commercial, political, or military purposes, thereby undermining other forms of valid knowledge, and especially wisdom (which often does not lend itself to easy scientific verification). Today's popular use of science is led by globally large, agile corporations and powerful governments. Ironically, its effect is to promote more credulity and blind faith in 'science' rather than careful skepticism and a balanced consideration of contending hypotheses. Studiedly ignored, in particular, are precisely those possibilities which do not sit well with corporate bottom lines.

This sort of commercially inflected science-worship has nothing to do with science proper. Corporate science-worship and uncritical acceptance of techno-power is as great a danger in our world as its opposite: the danger presented by the overtly denialist nonsense of 'populism'. Instead, we need a way (a *Tao*, one might say) that transcends both the deadliness of the 'all-knowingness' characteristic of the modern metropolitan elite 'progressive' mindset and the deadliness of the 'knownothingness' that has reactively sprung up against it. We urgently need the spirit of humility, of acknowledging ignorance and searching for authentic knowledge, and of ultimately seeking true wisdom, that is found, for instance, in thinkers as varied as Gandhi and Tagore, Wittgenstein and Ivan Illich, Wendell Berry and Ursula Le Guin. Science alone is, quite simply, not enough to see humanity through a crisis of such cataclysmic proportions as the one we are in.

Further, to avoid being systematically exposed to the global viral load circulating internationally due to rapidly growing jet travel, we need to completely remodel contemporary economies and enact the spirit of relocalisation found for instance in the experiments around Ubuntu in Africa, Pachemama in Latin America, Bija Swaraj in India, and in the work of activists such as Gaura Devi in India and Mamphela Ramphele in South Africa, Besime Conca in Kurdistan and Yu Xiaogang in China. The literal viral load of the coronavirus and the virtual viral load of the virus of the industrial-growthist lie that is the reality of most actually-existing 'sustainable development' and 'green economies' need to be shed.

Naturally occurring viruses are not malicious. Like other organisms, they try to survive, reproduce, and mutate where necessary and possible. When a species is accustomed to the presence of a particular virus (which has co-existed with it over a long period), there prevails a semblance of what may be called 'equilibrium' – since there are not many deaths in such cases. But if the virus mutates significantly and infects new species, the equilibrium is disturbed. There are likely to be many deaths in the new host species until a new ecological balance is established with the pathogen. Something like this seems to be happening with the prevailing strands of the Coronavirus, getting accustomed to whose presence will ultimately happen, but at a devastating price in the tens, possibly hundreds, of millions of human lives lost.

Our worst enemy today is public denial – by the highest authorities around the world – wherein we are told that the pandemic is all but over. There is plenty of evidence, well-recognised by acknowledged specialists and authorities that "**the forever virus**" is here to stay. It shall return to haunt different parts of the world in recurrent waves of possibly greater virulence and intensity. It is a reality that accompanies globalisation and eventually races past it, blighting its future unless it is called off.

Today, when the truth has come home to so many of us, we are suffering the loss of close kith and kin, and as we all find ourselves needing to go into periodic house arrest with each wave of the pandemic, it is time for us to awaken to the reality that human freedom, and survival itself, rests symbiotically upon the liberation of the natural world which has been under ceaseless assault for the last two centuries of industrial overkill. The Coronavirus is one of the last remaining lines of defence that nature has in what is, from its point of view, a guerrilla war in which its choices are severely constrained by the aggressive madness of human species ambition in an over-industrialised world. The conquest of nature, the reigning global myth of modernity needs to be relinquished if humanity and nature are to survive this otherwise tragically ill-fated war.

We ignore this wisdom at risk of death, and possibly species extinction. What's almost worse: to live while ignoring it is already a kind of living death.

It's time to return to life. The only post-Covid world is a post-globalised world. The only future for us is to create a new civilization from the gathering ruins of the current one. The industrial revolution needs to be transcended by an ecological one. Only this can renew our hopes for freedom in a yet dimly glimpsed future.

Part Six: Cop26

44. 10 tests for Cop26 [2021]

COP26 is a critical moment in human history, says Tina Rothery and Rupert Read of GreensCAN. The summit holds the potential to avert the climate crisis, but this can only occur if significant policy changes are made. The pair lay out 10 tests that they believe COP26 must meet, and outline further action that citizens can take if these are not met. – *Greenworld*

COP26 is critical to human history. The summit, originally scheduled for 2020, was supposed to be the most important COP since the achievement of the Paris Agreement, and was supposed to be about the implementation of that legislation. However, it was postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This left a year without COP, a year we can ill-afford to have lost. Thus, the 2021 summit is more important than ever.

The post-Covid reset will determine the economic parameters of the entire decade, henceforth deciding whether humanity is set on a path towards mass ecocide and self-destruction, or towards recovery. This gives the summit even greater significance. Will humanity take advantage of the temporary emissions reductions of 2020 and the new ways of working? Or will it revert to business-as-usual, and miss this last chance?

What follows are a set of basic demands on those attending COP26. This is not a wish list, this is the bare minimum. If these modest demands are not met, then COP26 will have failed us. This is the absolute bare bones of what 'the international community' must agree upon this autumn.

What COP26 should look like

The summit should be about policies and their implementation, not simply about agreeing on a new set of targets. The details will be for the different governments to sort out, but what is needed from COP26 is a shared commitment to action in a whole series of areas, such as transport, energy, and agriculture.

Since human-created climate change is actually economy-created, the climate crisis requires major changes to the world economy. Therefore, we need commitments from governments that they will act in accordance with COP26 decisions, as well as targets for institutions such as the IMF, World Bank, and World Trade Organisation, all three of which are still outside the UN system, including being open to the possibility of replacement by new bodies.

The other way in which climate should be tied into an economic agenda is through the greening of economic 'recovery' packages. We need to see governments at the summit sign up to pursuing decisions and targets in the design and implementation of their economic 'recovery' packages.

These three points outline a bottom-line set of requirements for the summit. We are asking governments to agree to pursue these policies alongside their economic 'recovery' plans, putting the focus principally at the national level. Measures at the global level will be needed to support that – through World Bank & IMF lending policies; WTO rewriting of trade rules; and, overarchingly, renewal of IPCC & UNFCCC processes.

The ten tests

1. An unprecedented investment in genuinely renewable energy. There must be no false solutions – no large scale monocultural afforestation/biofuels or BECCS; no buck-passing to future generations via gambles with Solar Radiation Management; and no planned 'overshoot' of climate targets. The shift to renewables must be accompanied by an unprecedented investment in improved energy efficiency in buildings and machinery; a shift in the burden of taxation, incentivising the purchase of greener items; and a systematic and integrated approach to the greening of cities. COP26 must prioritise renewables and deprioritise fossil fuels.

2. A thorough shift in transport away from petrol and diesel vehicles, and most crucially, away from aviation. This shift should not be a like-for-like substitution; this would not create the paradigm shift that we need. Instead, there needs to be a big shift towards active travel, public transport, and a substantial effort put into reducing the need to travel and move goods. The coronavirus pandemic has shown the vulnerability of carbon-profligate global supply chains; to reduce such vulnerability, a presumption should be established in favour of more localised/shorter supply lines. The transport sector is of such fundamental importance to the climate, being the sector where emissions are still, the pandemic aside, rising, that it needs special attention at the summit.

3. A huge free transfer of technology and funding to global South countries. The annual $100bn of funding and finance pledged at COP21 must be delivered, and fast. Debt-forgiveness and debt-for-nature swaps need stepping up. Unprecedented levels of funding – not finance – need to be made available to compensate for the losses and damage caused by climate-related disasters. Without these measures at minimum, the global South, and especially climate-vulnerable countries, will lose confidence in the summit.

4. A programme for transformational adaptation to dangerous human-triggered climate change. Defensive 'incremental' adaptation alone is no longer sufficient, and is, in fact, counter-productive, falsely encouraging us to believe that a mildly reformed version of the status quo can be retained. Defensive adaptation tries to keep the current, broken system going; transformational adaptation acknowledges the need for system change. This includes the restoration of natural biodiverse flood defences such as mangroves and wetlands, worldwide. Again, this needs unprecedented levels of funding from countries that have benefitted most from the fossil era. As a bare minimum, the UN acknowledged 'adaptation gap' in funding and finance must be closed.

5. Planetary boundaries should be taken seriously – there should be hard caps on resource use and pollution. These caps should only be softened if there is truly no alternative, and they should be precautionary, in line with the Stockholm Resilience Centre analysis. Growing awareness of the climate

crisis has led to a growing awareness of planetary boundaries – governments should respond to this by using 'beyond GDP' indicators to guide policy.

6. Companies should be legally required to disclose climate-related financial risks and/or dependence on fossil fuels, incorporating these into their financial accounts so that investors can see clearly the risk of their assets being stranded. Some countries already have such requirements, but there needs to be a more general following of this example, led by COP26.

7. Trade arrangements should be rewritten in order to facilitate a green transition – member states should agree to champion such changes through the institutions such as the WTO.

8. 'Net-zero' schemes via 'negative emissions technologies' should only be permitted where there is genuinely no alternative. 'Net' must never be an excuse for weak targets. Admirable efforts to draw down carbon emissions must not become an excuse for inaction.

9. Targets should be established for the reduction of industrial and intensive agriculture, especially in the case of animal farming. Agriculture and food can no longer be the elephant in the room; COP26 must show leadership in this sector, whose substantial methane and carbon emissions have been soft-pedalled on for too long.

10. Methods of allocation must ensure that women; children and young people; small businesses; and marginalised communities, including peasant and indigenous communities, share adequately in the benefits of any green government investment packages, or, at minimum, are not harmed or displaced by them. Crucially, too, they should be included amongst those making these decisions. Meanwhile, learning for sustainability should be prioritised in formal education systems. COP26 attendees must shift towards prioritising the development of 'ecological intelligence' as a goal for all learners and provide all professional educators with the skills required to nurture it. Children and young people are our future; they, as well as other marginalised groups, deserve to be placed much closer to climate-relevant decisions and deserve to be helped maximally to cope with the damaged world that adults are bequeathing to them.

Good COP, cr*p COP?

To repeat; these 10 measures are not an ideal-world wishlist; that would be much longer and more demanding, and would include a much stronger set of proposals to achieve climate justice. These demands are the bare bones of what needs to be agreed upon and set out for immediate action this year, rather than being kicked into the long grass of 2050, 2060, or even 2035. Respect for science and the Precautionary Principle demands a spirit of shared urgency, a quasi-wartime mobilisation.

Anything less will be failing the world, and failing future generations, for whose sake we need to act now.

If these 10 tests are not met, that would license a truth-forceful response by citizens, whose futures and children are on the line. We will be in Glasgow on 12 November, at the end of COP26, and we invite you to join us then. If the tests laid out above have been met, then the occasion will be one of

some celebration. If they have not been, then we two, GreensCAN and many more will be there to mark and narrate the occasion, and to urge COP delegates to stay longer until they get the job done.

We will not be there to get arrested. We will have no aim of getting arrested. We will be there to make clear, with our bodies and our voices, that nothing less than these 10 tests can possibly be enough; that less than these will mean that our 'leaders' are abandoning us all to a declining fate. We will not accept this crime against humanity and nature.

This is a moment that will endure in history. We urge you to join us.

45. The Davosification of Cop: Why Capitalism Hasn't Got Climate Covered [2021]

Jem Bendell and Rupert Read discuss the failure of the Cop26 climate conference, and what this failure means moving forward.

One of us (Rupert) is in the thick of Cop26 in Glasgow, the other (Jem) is watching the social media closely from the other side of the world. But to both of us this Cop has a look that is not pretty: Cop26 reminds us alarmingly of the World Economic Forum at Davos, which both of us have experienced in person…

To Rupert, what is plain to see on the ground is the painful contrast between the two worlds that he's flitting between in Glasgow, worlds that seem more divided than ever: the world of the official 'blue zone', that is the world of 'leaders' and negotiations and big corporates and shiny futures, with its constant air of rarefaction and self-importance … and the world outside: of XR non-violent direct action across central Glasgow, of a younger generation angrier than ever, of grief circles and community hubs. The former projects an almost constant sense of confidence that capitalism has got this covered, that we (they) are going to save the day and maintain profit margins throughout to boot; the latter veers between gallows humour and determination, between a reasonable despair and defiant bursts of 'optimism'.

To Jem, the same divide is stark: between the orgy of self-congratulation convulsing Linked-In and the panoply of bravery, solidarity and…eccentricity visible across Twitter; between the saviour elite telling itself (and anyone who will listen – but mostly itself…) that everything is

going to be fine and the bitter sense among an escalating portion of the public that a last chance saloon is dying in real time as we watch and chant and prepare.

The Linked-In Cop-eratti, who Rupert sees every day striding with a great exuding sense of apparent purpose from meeting to meeting inside the blue zone at Cop26, and the not-unconnected world of private jets, celebs, and the super-rich who form a half-hidden fringe to this Cop, remind Jem and Rupert both, strongly, of the vibe at Davos.

Now of course, this is not to say that Davos is all bad (see our https://theecologist.org/2020/mar/12/activist-engagement-davos-set). It's not to deny that some pockets of progress seem to be being made at Cop26, e.g perhaps on methane. It's not to tar all elites or all business with the same brush; it's true that, in the absence of any real political leadership (with striking exceptions such as the efforts of some of the Cop26 'high-level champions', and of the statesmanlike Prime Minister of Barbados), some in the business world have made bigger strides over the last year and the last week; it's true that the likes of B-Corps businesses offer some small glimmers of semi-hope amidst the dire vista of a neoliberalism still weirdly triumphant, even as symptoms of the nature-collapse that it has caused push closer to destroying itself – and nearly everything else. Our point though is that the narrative at this Cop, which has never really become the explicit narrative of any Cop before, but has always been the narrative of Davos – that there is no alternative, that endless 'growth' and eco-sense are compatible, that capitalism has this covered so we little people can all go back to sleep again – is a sign of sickness.

A civilisation that is locked into praising and relying on the very forces that have pushed the planet into the sixth mass extinction is a civilisation that is sick, and that will get iller until it radically changes course, either by breakdown or by design.

Consider the way in which more or less unregulated business is increasingly posing explicitly as saviour at this Cop. At an event of the consulting firm Accenture, Al Gore is praised to the skies for saying it's Ok if "narrow COP" (i.e. the actual negotiations!) doesn't meet the moment, as the "broader COP" of voluntary business announcements is what will make the difference. Here we see why business elites have started to choose to announce their new initiatives at COP, rather than at any other time of the year. It's maintaining the facade that capitalism-more-or-less-as-usual has got this climate thing covered.

Note of course that by "broad Cop" Gore does NOT mean the truly-broad Cop referred to above: the Cop of Glasgow focussing almost as a whole city on climate concern, the Cop of special film-showings and marches and civil disobedience and more. No; he means business.

This is how elites are going to try to maintain the fiction that Cop26 hasn't failed us, this week: they will elide the failure of political leaders to make transformative progress with the alleged success of what Gore calls "broad Cop". Elements of progress among business re our shared future will be spun as an excuse for government inaction. Businesses will pose as our saviours; and for some governments, under neoliberalism, that works out just fine. They don't even mind being thought ineffective, if the net result is more power to the businesses that feed and fund them.

After decades of voluntary corporate sustainability efforts, it's clear the problem is not the company executive that hasn't signed up to the latest voluntary commitment. The problem is the economic system which commands companies to keep expanding and 'externalising' costs just to stay in business. This problem cannot be sorted by voluntary alliances alone; because built into it is a deep free-rider problem. So long as businesses are not held to a higher playing field by regulation etc., there will always be openings for bad climate actors to exploit.

The sickness that we've been describing can be understood more deeply in psychical terms:

How can our 'leaders' and the supporting strata of elites beneath them who have official Cop26 in their hands aspire to face up to climate reality, when they are not willing or able to slow down to actually sense into this moment, not willing to undergo a dark night of the soul, not willing to sit more than a micro-moment in despair or depression?

The global elite has quit the hard denial response to the climate tragedy, only to get stuck in the softer phase of bargaining.

But guess what. You can't bargain with the atmosphere. You can't bargain with nature. And bargaining over the very existence of our children and of this beautiful living planet is sick.

A moment in history is now imminent, in our view. It is the moment when a huge new portion of the public comes to realise that there are very few adults in the room inside the corridors of power at Cop26 or its ilk. To realise that no-one is coming to the rescue; that the elite is seemingly determined to go on colonising the life-world until it gnaws away its own foundations. The moment when a new awakening occurs, into the pain-suffused truth of a climate breakdown that is near-certainly going to be much harsher than any 'leader' is yet willing to admit.

We think this moment will land on or around Nov.12 2021. True, a key point of the orgy of self-congratulation among the elite is to prevent this moment; to seek to spin Cop26 as

putting humanity back on track for a safe future. But we think this stratagem of theirs mostly isn't going to work. Because this was the Cop that was supposed to ratchet us to a secure 1.5 degree post-Paris future; and that is obviously not on the cards. And because this was the historic Cop in the middle of the 'emerging from Covid' moment, the Cop that could have seized the opportunity of the post-lockdowns reset to chart and build a transformed future; and to think that that has happened is frankly to be sinking back from bargaining into outright denial again.

The imminent awakening, a difficult emergence from the pupae of the plagued year, midwifed by 2021's unprecedented climate disasters, which tragically are only the beginning, will (we think) take three main forms.

Firstly, a lot of people who have been putting it off are about to experience the pain of climate anxiety and eco-grief. They need support.

Secondly, the unsettling realisation that the elite are so far up their own story of imagined world-salvation that, absurdly, they feel Cop26 to be a success will contribute to a growing climate-anger. A wide mobilisation is coming that could make the youth strikes for climate look small.

And thirdly, part of that mobilisation will take the form of a pivot to adaptation. As it sinks in that there are no cavalry, and that the Davosified elite at Cop have no intention of a significant course-correction, there will be a movement towards Transformative and Deep Adaptations. For, once you take in the scary reality that some kind of climate nemesis is not going to be prevented, it's up to us all to cope with the consequences.

Be scared. Be angry. Be loving. Be ready. Become resilient.

Mark this coming awful and yet, if together we face it authentically, hopeful moment in history. Mark it with us, on Friday Nov. 12, and thereafter.

Appendix I

Review of *Parents for a Future* [2021, previously unpublished]

Frank Scavelli reviews Rupert Read's new work, *Parents for a Future*, from his perspective as a younger person whose elders, unlike Read, by and large have abandoned his, and his entire generation's, future. Previously unpublished.

What does it mean to love your children in a time of dangerous climate change and ecological disintegration caused by human beings? This is the central issue raised by Rupert Read in his new book, *Parents for a Future*. The title itself bears consideration – will there be 'a future' for the children at all? And what of the children of today's children? What kind of world are you, and we, leaving them?

The context for Read's work is this: humanity is on a path toward self-annihilation. As Read notes, this fact haunts our society like a specter: it is increasingly felt by the denizens of the world, yet all the same remains unacknowledged, in anything approaching its true gravity, by our social and economic structures and institutions. We are, in real terms and despite the growing clamour, doing nothing to halt our slide toward ecological death. The world ecosystem – already scraped to the bone by centuries of resource-extraction, now in definitive 'overshoot' (at the present and still-increasing rate, we would need an entire second Earth just to 'break even' on the ratio of exploitation vs regeneration), habitat destruction, and the extinction of species (now occurring at a rate of one species every 10 or so minutes, compared to the natural rate of about one species per year) – is set to be fatally overtaken by rapid-onset climate change in the coming decades, resulting in total ecosystemic collapse. Numerous independent studies and the UN have warned: society will not survive such an event, with 'multiple breadbasket failures' and resulting famine being the preeminent concern, among many, from rising seas to the general extinction of insects, necessary for even small-scale, communal agriculture and familial gardening, numbers of which having declined by 75% in recent decades. We are, simply put, *destroying* our only home. As David Attenborough warns: 'we are facing a man-made disaster on a global scale, our greatest threat in thousands of years. If we don't take action the collapse of our civilization and the extinction of much of the natural world is on the horizon.'

What are we collectively doing about this? The best we have is the Paris Agreement – an agreement which, if followed, dooms us to *at least* three degrees C of warming – at least, because we have no idea at what point global overheat becomes self-reinforcing via feedback mechanisms, totally and permanently escaping our control. And the Paris Agreement does nothing to counteract the simple insanity of our endlessly-expansive economic system – in itself a fatal contradiction, as, the most basic 'common sense' tells us, you simply cannot have infinite 'growth' on a finite planet, no matter how supposedly 'green' it is. As disturbing as it may be to plainly state, even if climate change somehow became a nonissue, the rate of habitat loss, extinction, plastic pollution (more plastic than animal life in the oceans by 2050), *et al*. from so-called 'economic growth,' in and of itself, would still be enough

to annihilate and forever destroy Nature in my lifetime (b. 1995), in turn leading to the collapse of our civilization in a global holocaust one shudders to imagine. As Read aptly puts it, the question of our time is indeed: what kind of world are we leaving for our children? What kind of world are and have the preceding generations left and are going to leave me, and those my age and younger, when they, our parents and grandparents, are all gone? Even as I write, as a young adult, the gravity and depravity of the situation, when measured against the lack of action and the chatter that passes for 'news' everyday, fills me with rage, disgust, and sadness. We are dooming ourselves and our descendants to a hell on earth – not hyperbole, not bleeding-heart oversentiment, but simple, cold, scientific fact.

Fortunately, there is still a rapidly closing window left to act, to avert this catastrophe. But we have not *really* even begun to think of acting, let alone begun the actual wholesale social and economic transformation required to meet this challenge – as Attenborough states, the greatest humanity has ever faced. Read's book is written for the express purpose of initiating this process – of setting people, in all hope, on the road toward coming to terms with not only the gravity of the situation, but what we must do to overcome it. How?

Read's primary intellectual tool in this regard, implicit in the title itself, is a simple one, mirrored in the refrain of the Youth Climate Strikers, 'save our world!,' yet conspicuously absent from what passes for news and observation in the mainstream of both media and academia: what will become of the children? Read starts off from a simple and practically irrefutable sentiment: we all care about the young – if not our own children, then nieces, nephews, or neighbors; it is surely a strange kind of human being who, even if he or she is absent of all childlike acquaintances, earnestly professes no care whatsoever for the young, the most vulnerable in our society, with whose care we are all implicitly entrusted. Yet Read goes one step further, and in doing so heads off possible routes of counter argument: what if one, for instance, is willing to die for their children, but in all honesty is not so concerned with their grandchildren, or great grandchildren, or for that matter, great-great-great grandchildren? When considering the young, and their future, it is plain that they, too, will have kids someday, and their care for their children's wellbeing will be comprised of all burning love parents, guardians, teachers, aunts, uncles and the rest of us feel now. This becomes recursive: to care for the children of today means to care for their children, and so on. We are connected to the whole future of humanity in this great linkage of love and care, through time, not only with our descendants, but with our ancestors, who by their innermost nature cared for us. Is human life meaningful without this essential conceit, care for our descendants, care for providing them *with a future*?

After establishing this framework, this way of assessing the challenge we face in light of care for the children, and their descendants, Read shows, citing some of what I have laid out above, that care for future humanity means care for future ecology – and therefore, *present ecology*: there is no real way of earnestly wanting the best for our children, and by extension their children, and so on, while wrecking the Earth, and the world ecosystem they will depend on. As such, the 'ecocentric' view of environmental stewardship, which places intrinsic value in the natural world, and the 'anthropocentric' view, which places intrinsic value only in human beings and their wants and cares, become indistinguishable: human flourishing, in both the near and long-term, is only assured on an

ecologically-thriving world. Preempting any arguments that 'humans really matter – the whales, birds, bees, and trees don't,' Read thus shows that care for the former necessitates care for the latter.

Having noted the universal nature of love for our children, and with it love for future humanity, and with this necessarily care for the natural world, Read addresses the famous adage, 'what, then, is to be done?' via three institutional proposals. The first is the Citizen's Assembly. These bodies, to be instituted at the local, regional, national, and international levels, should be drawn by lot, uniformly representing society by age, sex, race, and occupation, in this way being truly democratic in a manner which all-too-clearly eludes our so-called 'representative democracies' and their institutions across much of the 'developed' world. These assemblies, composed of, by, and for *the people*, will be presented with the best scientific evidence regarding the state of the world, and possible solutions: in such a way, Citizen's Assemblies may arrive at hard-to-reach conclusions relative to the present horizon of 'political possibilities,' possessing the political will and clear-sightedness lost on our politicians, enmeshed as they are in the ossified, media narrative determined, corporate-state matrix which comprises governmental life in contemporary 'liberal democracies.' The Citizen's Assemblies have been utilized to great effect in Ireland in just the last few years to address such important, divisive issues as abortion, constitutional reforms, and the ageing population.

The second proposal is to incorporate legislative bodies, again drawn by lot and representative of society as a whole, who will act in a further capacity from even the Citizen's Assemblies: Guardians for Future Generations. The task of the Guardians will be to ratify and/or veto the decisions both of the Citizens Assemblies and normal political institutions, in the name of expressing the voice of *future generations*, who have already been robbed of so much by the heedless actions of their ancestors. Read draws inspiration for this concept from, among others, the practice of the Iroquois Confederacy, who consider the view and needs of the next seven generations when making major decisions. Consideration of future generations precludes rafts of current social and economic practices (how will those two-hundred years from now, *if there are human beings*, feel about an ocean *permanently polluted* with plastic microparticles – it being *impossible* to retrieve these particles from the ocean once they have entered it?)

The third proposal, which acts as a guiding principle for the first two, as well as society as a whole, is a signature aspect of Read's philosophical work: The Precautionary Principle. The Precautionary Principle is magnificently simple, like much of *Parents for a Future* itself, yet wide-reaching in impact if its import is grasped by and applied to contemporary thought and society: decisions should err on the side of pre-caution. A marvelous concept, and one completely lacking in our societal decision making! The Precautionary Principle indicates: If there is a risk of predominantly negative consequences and effects, catastrophic or otherwise, attendant to any given decision, the risk should not be taken, and the decision not made – the burden is on, for instance, the corporation, to prove that the pesticide they wish to use is *totally safe*, not on the *community* to present decades of cancer cases and wildlife decline, long after the harm has been caused, as reason for its being banned. Similarly, the Precautionary Principle precludes all talk of planetary geo-engineering projects to stave off climate disaster (the subject of the recent George Clooney film, Midnight Sky, in which all of humanity dies from such an attempt), with humanity in such a scenario mystifyingly continuing business as usual,

then risking the state of the entire planet in schemes the effects of which are *literally incalculable*, and which seem to be culled from 1950s B movies, from putting continent-sized mirrors in space, to the mass spraying aerosols in attempts to cool the atmospheres. The Precautionary Principle locks society, and our decision making bodies, into a permanently ecological mold – simply because, as Read establishes, ecological health is directly tied to human wellbeing, and any threat to ecology represents a grave threat to human beings, now and especially in the future.

Read's book is delightfully written, full of engaging rhetoric, well-tuned metaphor, and emotive dialogue with the reader, all of which only seeks to ask the simple question, 'do we *actually* care for the children? Do we want them to have *a future*?' – and if the answer is a resounding *yes*, provide some way forward in the lessening daylight of impactful action: a way forward which is simple and eminently sane, in a maze-like world of contradictory opinions and an overall zeitgeist of what, under sober accounting, can only be described as societal insanity. The fact that the state of the world is such that the simple question, 'do you love your children?' stirs such far-reaching implications regarding the entire direction of our society speaks to the *insanity* of our time.

At 25, I myself have been both impressed and saddened by Read's work – it is a virtual certainty that my own children, who will be my age around 2055, will have a life significantly worse than mine, barring the massive change Read convincingly and correctly argues is intrinsic to the future wellbeing, and even survival, of the human species. Read ultimately argues, in line with the above proposals, for a radical re-localization of social and economic life: a return to local food production and manufacture, and simple, communal ways of living, replete with far less travel, less busyness, less noise, less anxiety, depression, loneliness, and meaninglessness. The moment of our greatest peril could be the moment of our greatest glory and salvation from the contemporary social malaise, if we humans find the will to fundamentally reorient ourselves: in this reorientation, humanity will find newfound meaning as *guardians* of our world, and of our *future*. Is that really less preferable to what we have now: iPhones and McDonalds, our very own Modern champagne and caviar, on the deck of a rapidly *sinking ship*? Without truly massive change, without the arising within all of us of a love for our children, our descendants, and the whole of nature, my own life and those of my generation will resemble a veritable hell long after the people who currently wield power, and who have benefited from the cataclysmic heating of the Earth and annihilation of the world ecosystem – those who refuse to 'save our future' – lie in their graves. And my descendants? My grandkids, and my great-great-great-great grandkids? If trends go unaltered, there may well be none to speak of. Without a real coming to terms with this fact, with a genuine consideration of the question '*will the children have a future*?', we will not even begin to effect the change we need, before it is far too late – and that hour grows near.

The virtual book launch of Parents for a Future, with discussion by Read and others, can be found here.

Spring, 2021

Appendix II

Five Books: Ecophilosophy [2021]

Rupert Read discusses with Nigel Warburton five books which he deems foundational to his understanding of ecophilosophy: *Lyrical Ballads* by Wordsworth and Coleridge; *Letters From a Young Poet, 1887 to 1895* by Rabindranath Tagore; *The Imperative of Responsibility* by Hans Jonas; *Entropia* by Samuel Alexander; *Down to Earth* by Bruno Latour.

Let's start with the obvious question before we talk books. What is eco-philosophy?

I'd say eco-philosophy is philosophy that stands on the Earth, or, to put it in a way which is slightly more etymological, it's the love of wisdom about all things earthly. So it's thinking about how our ecology has philosophical implications, and how philosophy may have ecological implications. Eco-philosophy has to do with ethics, obviously. But it's not just ethics. It's also to do with what kinds of beings we are, what kinds of things we can hope for, what kind of world this is. In a way eco-philosophy embraces all philosophy in my opinion, but certainly a broad swathe of philosophical thinking that includes epistemology, metaphysics, phenomenology, and ethics insofar as they are relevant to the nature of our existence as earthlings.

It seems to me that what you're saying is that it's the philosophy that focuses on questions about ecology, and the environment, and our relationship to the living world. And so just about everything's eco-philosophy in that sense. But the really important aspect of it is surely where its emphasis lies: in a kind of urgency in relation to the scientific evidence about the climate crisis and impacts of industrialisation on our climate, our ecology and on our social structures. That is what I understand by eco-philosophy anyway.

Absolutely. And industrialisation is highly relevant to most of my book choices. My final book choice, Bruno Latour's *Down to Earth* is about the increasingly important question of whether we're going to stay with this idea of ourselves as earthlings, or whether we're going to try and escape our earthly nature, which, because of technological advances, is supposedly starting to be a live question.

And just before we get into this, for people who think that simply philosophising about these things, is probably not enough. Could you say a bit about your own active involvement in ecological concerns?

Yes. I'm a professor at the University of East Anglia, where I've been researching and teaching for many years, increasingly about this stuff. Obviously, when one does that one needs to be appraised of the science, but science is not everything. We'll talk about that, how there are considerations to do with precaution that seed ethical questions that go beyond what science has to offer. And, as you imply, I strongly believe that it's not enough just to philosophise. Philosophers interpret the world. But it also needs changing. And I've tried to do some of that as well. I've been involved in various kinds of activism for many years. Recently, I was heavily involved in Extinction Rebellion, strategising for them,

meeting with the government for them, going on TV for them. That's a very interesting way of engaging with the public and trying to bring an intellectual perspective to bear, but doing it very much out there in the real world.

Let's talk about these eco-philosophy books. What's your first choice?

So the first book—perhaps a bit of an unexpected choice—is *Lyrical Ballads* by William Wordsworth, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. This is a fascinating book in so many ways. One thing that's so unusual about it is that it is a book of poems by more than one author. Why did Wordsworth and Coleridge decided to produce this, together? Well, basically, it was because they regarded themselves as having something to say, something to contribute that went way beyond the sphere of pleasing or thought provoking in a purely literary sense.

The *Lyrical Ballads* was a kind of manifesto for a new way of doing poetry. The form of the poetry was very shocking at the time and they were also bringing a new point to poetry. And that point is what really brings this very close to eco-philosophy. What they tried to do in the *Lyrical Ballads* was to produce a sort of poetic manifesto for thinking about nature in a different way, in a more serious way, than was customary at the time.

We know this as one of the great statements of the philosophy, or ideology, of Romanticism, which is a point of view, a perspective on the world that I believe needs to be taken incredibly seriously. Romanticism has been viewed over the last couple of centuries, most of the time, as a middle class indulgence or something. As something which is nice, but really can't be the main way to live one's life. Wordsworth and Coleridge, were among those who were really serious about it, saying, 'Look, this should be something like the basis of life', which obviously brings it very, very close to philosophy. They thought that what we call Romanticism should be the way that we live, the way that we orient ourselves towards the world. And, they thought, if we are missing the kinds of things that they were trying to get at, that were present in their poems, they thought, in a certain sense, we were missing everything.

You could think of the *Lyrical Ballads* as a confrontation with the emerging spirit of industrialism. At the very time they were writing these poems, the Industrial Revolution was really taking off in England. They were seeking to resist that, but to resist it actively, and to sketch a live alternative. I think they do it absolutely brilliantly and profoundly.

Sometimes in Britain, we tend to venerate and get excited about speakers of German or French or other languages more than we do speakers of English. And that can happen with Romanticism, as well. I think these poems are astonishingly fine in the main, I think they're really important. They were brought together by these two authors in the prime of their talent and I think they still have something to teach us now.

So, just to give a flavour of it, could you pick out an overarching message or a message from within a single poem that you tells us something about ethics?

Yes. I'd like to read out a little passage from the final poem in the book. I don't think it's a coincidence that it is the final poem. It's 'Lines written above Tintern Abbey' by Wordsworth. I could have picked many poems from the book, most of them by Wordsworth, or I could have picked something else, perhaps something from Wordsworth's amazing narrative poem, 'The Prelude', which points in much the same direction. But this is a particularly powerful passage. And I think it'll be clear, as I read it, how this is philosophically relevant. Here we go:

"…And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense, sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused…"

This idea of interfusion, I think, is something which philosophers could take some notice of.

"…Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean, and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things…"

So there's some kind of sense there, which you might connect in a way with philosophical Idealism, of a central importance to the human mentality, *and* the fusing of it with the world. And then the poem continues with this line,

"…Therefore am I still
A lover of the meadows and the woods,
And mountains; and of all that we behold
From this green earth, of all the mighty world
Of eye and ear,—both what they half create
And what perceive;…"

I think this is very lovely, these final lines I read, "both what they half create/ And what perceive". Somehow our minds and our senses are involved in the creation of what they perceive and don't merely perceive it—nor do they merely create it. There's a kind of active interfusion. And that, I think, is part of what Wordsworth was seeking to give us in this poem.

It's striking of course that these poems are poems about the countryside, about the Lake District and, in this case of Tintern Abbey, in Wales. They're rural scenes, places of great beauty.

But, as John Stuart Mill and various other people have pointed out, 'nature' applies to everything. Nature isn't simply the beautiful landscape, it's the whole thing. What's natural is what we do. Isn't there a place for an ecology of cities and ecology of factories even? Aren't we in danger of a kind of

romanticisation of the countryside, which, actually today, isn't the greenest place to live, except visually?

Let's start with nature. Is nature everything? I'd say yes and no. I think it's really important that the word 'nature' is used in different ways in different contexts. There is a really important use of the word 'nature' often made by philosophers, where it's simply everything, and it's opposed only to the supernatural, or the non-existent.

But I think it's important to remember that there's another sense of the word 'nature', which is not that, which is nature as opposed to culture, or nature as opposed to the urban environment. There's an important use for that concept of nature, as well. I've argued previously, that actually, it's not a coincidence that we have these two senses of nature, and I think we can't do without either of them.

Am I implying that we can't think in the kind of way that Wordsworth does about cities and so forth? No, not at all. And in that context, of course, it's really interesting that another of the great poems in the *Lyrical Ballads* is 'Composed upon Westminster Bridge, September, the Third 1802'. It's a splendid poem, which begins:

"Earth has not anything to show more fair,
Dull would he be of soul who could pass by
A site, so touching in its majesty:
This city now doth, like a garment,
Wear the beauty of the morning…"

There you have Wordsworth doing that, bringing the spirit of Romanticism into the heart of the city; but does that mean in turn, that we just simply have to accept that it all comes together as a package, and we have to just roll over and accept industrialisation and accept all its consequences? I don't think it does means that either. I think that there's a dialectical relationship, if you will, between these two senses of nature. And what Wordsworth and Coleridge try to give us is a sense of the beauty of wild nature and rural nature, a sense of the same thing sometimes in cities, but also a sense, often by a sort of implied contrast, of where these things can go wrong. I think that they did start to go wrong in some pretty serious ways, during the Industrial Revolution.

I think it would obviously be absurd to say simply, 'It would have been better if the Industrial Revolution hadn't have happened.' But I don't think it's totally absurd to say something like, 'Imagine if the industrial revolution had happened a lot more slowly, or a lot more carefully, or a lot more selectively.' Among other things, we wouldn't be in the situation that we are in now, where we have to contemplate the possible destruction of our civilisation and even of our species, this century. That's part of what's motivating the choices of my books here today. What if we were able to think philosophically and in ways that inform philosophy, through literature and other sources, that might make it less likely that we head down this path to mutual self-destruction?

I like that poem you quoted about the sublime and the feeling of connection with something bigger. I think that's something that almost anybody would recognise as having experienced, at least from

time to time, and it reminds me very much of Schopenhauer. And I suspect German idealism, as you say, is the source of some of Wordsworth's thinking, but it also puts me in mind of that poem by Dylan Thomas, which is almost pure Schopenhauer, 'The force that through the green fuse drives the flower,'—there he writes about the life energy, or the 'world as will' as Schopenhauer would have expressed it.

Is there some kind of message from Wordsworth and Coleridge about what we should do. There's that famous line from Auden, 'Poetry makes nothing happen', which is probably false. It's certainly false but, on the other hand, it's true that poetry doesn't make a lot happen.

What Wordsworth and Coleridge offered us—and I think it did have some consequence—is a sense of, or a way of being in the world, which wouldn't just take for granted nostrums of so-called progress, thinking that there's nothing to do in the face of industrialisation bar roll over and accept it. This has, of course, been often a defensive or rear-guard action, but it's a rear-guard action which has had some real effects. Here's an interesting question: would you have had organisations like the National Trust, if you hadn't had poets like Wordsworth and Coleridge? Now obviously, that's an impossible counterfactual question to answer. But it seems to me that one might at least speculate that ideas and practices such as those embedded in amazing organisations like the National Trust, or later, the National Parks, don't come from nowhere; they come from a certain kind of cultural milieu, or a certain kind of sense of what's possible and what's important. The lines are not going to be direct. It would be very difficult to write an impact case study for Wordsworth. But I think there are likely to be real connections there and perhaps quite deep and significant connections.

And my thought is that we need to go back to some of these writers and thinkers and see their relevance now that the consequences of rampant, reckless industrialism are much plainer to see. I see people like Wordsworth and Rabindranath Tagore, who we'll come on to in a minute, as visionaries and people with a cultural and philosophical influence who need to be listened to now if there is going to be a future.

Let's move on to your second book, Tagore's *Letters From a Young Poet, 1887 to 1895*.

A book by another great literary figure, this time from the east: Rabindranath Tagore. It's not one of his best-known books, but in my opinion, it is one of his very best. It's a collection of letters to his niece. And when he wrote these, in most cases, there would have been absolutely no thought of publication, which makes their quality all the more remarkable. You might think of this book as an eastern epistolatory nature philosophy. It contains passages of astounding beauty about the natural world that Tagore was inhabiting, which was basically the river deltas around Calcutta. It also contains his reflections on how these give us a very different sense of what's important and of how to live than one gets in the city. It's a sort of Eastern counterpart, as I see it, of Romanticism, and again, very visionary.

I've been dipping into Henry Thoreau's *Walden* recently, and also I've reviewed, Peter Godfrey-Smith's recent book *Metazoa*. What struck me about both of those books—both written by philosophers—was that most of the argument is carried in a certain kind of description, a very

attentive way of responding to what's in front of them, the natural world, as we say. In the case of Thoreau, it was the changing natural world he was living in by Walden Pond, self-exiled, as it were, in a little hut there for a couple of years. For Peter Godfrey-Smith it was diving

in the sea near Sydney looking at, for the most part, things like sea anemones and shrimps, as well as octopuses, but looking really hard. And the first stage of this process is a willingness to describe with great attention, what's in front of your nose.

Very nice. I think that's a great connection. It also reminds me of the philosopher who has been a great influence on my work, Wittgenstein, who over and over again emphasised the importance of description. There are those key lines in *Philosophical Investigations*, 'don't think but look; I repeat, don't think but look!'; look at how language actually works, look at real examples. And possibly it's no coincidence that for Wittgenstein Tagore was a towering figure. When Wittgenstein encountered the Vienna Circle in the 1920s, they thought they were going to be meeting a scientifically-minded philosopher, and they were absolutely astonished when Wittgenstein chose to read out long passages from Tagore to them, instead!

I think that connection with Walden that you've essayed there is a very apt one, Nigel—not very distant in time, from this book of Tagore's. I think the sensibilities of Thoreau and Tagore are quite similar. And interestingly, neither of them are really writing from or about the deep wilderness, but writing about the places where nature intersects with human life, and also very much writing about water, and places where, water and trees and human beings come together and combine.

It's interesting too that nobody teaches philosophers to describe the world. They just want to argue, give reasons, and find evidence which supports their conclusion—a conclusion which they may have already reached before they've started the process—if that's not too cynical. I don't think there's an innocent eye. But there's a great value in an immersion in a place either socially or physically, in trying new things, and in communicating something about the complexity of what it is you're actually thinking about, not assuming how everything is before you start.

Absolutely. And this is very much what Tagore does. He's basically spending leisure time in the Ganges Delta, and in the nearby tributary rivers, especially the Padma, which is the one that he loves. He just writes these letters to his niece and describes what he sees. And then, sometimes, he draws morals or parallels.

So let me read you a little one here, which is quite intriguing for us. Here he's contrasting the existence he has on the Ganges Delta and his boat with the world he lives in the majority of the time. He says this:

"The world in which I find myself is full of very strange human beings. They are all occupied night and day with rules and building walls. They carefully put up curtains just in case their eyes actually see anything. Really, the creatures of this world are very strange. It's a wonder they don't cover up every flowering bush, or erect canopies to keep out the moonlight."

I think it's a splendid remark. It intrigues me that he's interested in something there, which I'm also interested in, which is the way in which we're not very good—and I include philosophers in this typically—at noticing the world outside of… not necessarily our own minds, but of our own human-made environments. In other words, it's almost as if Tagore is saying here, 'Why are people so obsessed with staying in the cave, when there are these wonderful, natural landscapes, that you could see if you just *turned your head* and look outside.'

I encountered a great example of this some years ago at the University of East Anglia. I was in a meeting with a bunch of colleagues in the Humanities faculty. We were talking about whether we were going to create a new school of the Humanities. And outside the window there developed this astounding, huge thunderstorm, one of the most ferocious thunderstorms I've ever seen; and no one took a blind bit of notice of it. I just couldn't understand it, and I couldn't relate to that non-seeing. I just thought, 'Why aren't we stopping and appreciating, and taking in this this astounding, perhaps once-in-a-lifetime phenomenon.' But it seemed to me as if my colleagues literally didn't notice or, if they did, they deliberately turned their heads back inside again. That incident has stayed with me.

I've got an experience that has something in common with that. I once went to a wedding with a philosopher friend, and we were being driven by a third philosopher. We were driving through part of Norfolk through open land with trees and they didn't have low branches. One of my travelling companions noted that we could probably conclude from this, that there were deer around that had eaten them. But the irony was that there were all these antlers sticking out through the grass. You could see the deer. You didn't have to reason to their existence indirectly.

Before we move on to your third choice, can I just ask, is the Tagore book the kind of book that you would read from cover to cover? Or is it one you might dip into and enjoy it—one letter at a time?

Well, one of the nice things about this book is that it was never the intention of Tagore himself for this to be a book. I've done it both ways. The first time I read it, I read it all the way through and became more and more absorbed. But it's equally possible to just dip in.

Your third eco-philosophy book choice is *The Imperative of Responsibility* by Hans Jonas.

My third choice is more classically within the philosophical canon. *The Imperative of Responsibility* is probably Jonas's masterpiece. He wrote this book in 1979. It's a contemporary classic, in the sense that it's really foundational, in my view (but not just in my view), for environmental ethics because it's a book—and this is over 40 years ago now—that really takes seriously, as very few had before, the change that needs to come to philosophy. We need to start taking seriously the change that has come to us as a species as a result of industrialism, as a result of our growing technological power.

The argument that Jonas makes in an early part of the book is that this growing technological power forces upon us new questions and new responsibilities. He thinks that traditional ethics was not really well placed to answer or respond to the imperative of responsibility for our planetary home. I think he's basically right. And, increasingly, that's almost taken for granted, at least outside a few holdout departments of moral philosophy. But, at the time, it was quite a bold thing to argue. So Jonas says, for

example, that nuclear war and environmental devastation are possibilities that mean that it's not adequate anymore just to think within the confines of Kantianism, or Utilitarianism or similar perspectives.

In particular, he emphasises the way that so much of ethics is designed to deal with person-to-person interactions, which are not cumulative; whereas the choices that have increasingly faced us over the past couple of generations, are on a vast scale, and are cumulative over time. They demand foresight. They demand—in terms which have been increasingly important to me and my work in recent years—precaution. They demand that we think ahead, and take care ahead of time; they demand, in particular, that we don't wait until all the scientific evidence is in. If we wait until all the evidence is in with regard to these kinds of threats, we may have waited until a time when it's no longer possible for us to head off the threat. This is especially relevant to problems like genetic modification and geo-engineering. But it's still relevant to climate as well.

We have vast evidence now on dangerous man-made climate change, but there are still issues that we don't fully understand. And there always will be. That's in the nature of any question being a scientific question. The question is not entirely settled yet, which sometimes makes it difficult for scientists to communicate well in the public domain. So, even with regard to climate, there are questions about climate sensitivity, for example, which mean that, beyond the evidence, we need to bring in a precautionary perspective. And it was on that notion that Jonas really did the spade work in this wonderfully written book.

For people my age—I'm nearly 60—these are questions about responsibilities we have to people who will outlive us. That's when the worst is likely to hit. Lots of people seem merely motivated by things that happen or are likely to happen within their own lifetimes. So it doesn't seem irrational to think only about yourself—my conscious lifetime, my experiences, what happens to those I care about. The further away you get from now, the harder it is accurately to predict what life will be like. Who could have predicted the internet's impact social life 30 years ago? Who would have known about citizen science? Those sorts of things didn't exist.

So, I can't project with much certainty into the future but, in any case, isn't it quite rational to think about my life and my short-term cost/benefit analysis when thinking about how I should live? Added to that, if you think the human species is going to continue, and other animals which you have duties to, or responsibilities for are doing to keep going on into the future, aren't you going to be overwhelmed by what you have to do in the present for the future? How can you start to think about those things without being swamped? If you're a consequentialist you're going to end up living on nothing and sacrificing everything about this life for a possible future one that someone else may or may not get to live.

Those are great questions. I think they're really important. I think that the thing about those two questions you ended up there with, is that there's a real danger that, because we don't really want to hear the answer to the questions, we try not to ask them very deeply.

In other words, I don't think we should be living on virtually nothing now. And I think that extreme consequentialist visions of what we should be doing don't cut the mustard. But what I certainly think, is that we should be thinking far more carefully, and seriously, about what we owe to future people, what we owe to our descendants. If we allowed ourselves to really do that thinking, everything would change about the way that we live.

Now, how do we motivate that? Well, this is the topic of my new book, *Parents for a Future*, and the argument that I make at the core of this book, which has been much influenced by Jonas in the background, is that, if you simply accept that we are in a period of potential environmental catastrophe—and I think everyone has to accept that now, that at the very least we are facing a *potential* true environmental catastrophe—and if you are serious about loving your own children, that itself is enough to impel a long-term care for the entire Earth, and to draw the consequences now for how we need to change living our lives now, including politically.

How so? Because my argument is that if you love your children, you have to make it possible for them to extend the same love to their children, and this swiftly iterates into the future. And then, in order to ensure that we are placing them in the best possible position to have a future, we have to provide them with the basic conditions for that, which is not so much a question of us denying ourselves everything, but rather a question of us ensuring that they're not denied the right to have everything, or even anything—crucially, functional ecosystems, the capacity to live, breathe, eat, drink, and so on. We should assume that human beings are going to need that for a very, very long time to come.

So the argument I would make on a broadly Jonasian basis, and the argument I do make in this book, is that we do, indeed, have deep responsibilities to the future. This means that we have to change the way that we live now. Anything less is reckless, and unethical, and means that we won't be able to look our children in the eye in the future. If we don't change everything and change it fast, there is highly likely to be a massive deterioration, an historic deterioration, or potential collapse in the quality of life in our children's generation. If that happens, then every child, sooner or later, every descendant, sooner or later, is going to turn around and ask the one question they will be interested in knowing the answer to: What did you do while there was still time? So that's another motivation that I'm trying to bring to bear in this book—regret-avoidance: avoiding being in the position of not being able to say, 'I did everything that I could.' Hopefully doing everything that we can will be enough. But if it isn't, you still want to know that you at least did everything that you could.

Is Jonas' book a dense philosophical tome, or is it something that is written for a wider audience?

Well, it's a bit of both. But it's certainly not a light read. And I think you can't get the full impact of it unless you're willing to give it some serious attention, and probably to read most of it or all of it. Before we leave it, let me just give you one little example of the philosophical power and broader relevance of the book. One of the things that Jonas does in the book is offer a kind of refutation of the famous philosophical is/ought distinction or fact/value distinction.

And this is how he does it.

"When asked for a single instance, and one is enough, where the coincidence of the 'is' and the 'ought' occurs, we can point at the most familiar sight, the new-born, whose mere breathing uncontradictably addresses an 'ought' to the world around, namely, to take care of him."

So the suggestion that Jonas makes there is: simply looking at a new-born baby is enough to unleash the imperative of responsibility. I'm not certain that I agree with him. I've argued in print in the past that, actually, we need to have a sort of virtue of love or care that intervenes there to help us. But it's a very, very powerful idea, a powerful attempt at disagreeing with one of the main dogmas of philosophy.

Your next eco-philosophy book is *Entropia*, a novel.

My next book is by far the least well known of my authors, and it's by far the least well known book. It's by my friend and colleague, Samuel Alexander, with whom I've co-written a couple of books now, including my little book, *This Civilisation is Finished*.

This is a book that deserves to be much better known than it is. And, of the things that Samuel has written, I think it's the most important. It's a philosophical novel. What Sam wants to do, is to depict a future in which industrial growth and society have collapsed, and people are trying to live on the wreckage in a way that is sustainable. And they're trying to live in that sense within entropic limits, trying to be scavengers of the old civilisation and to remake a new viable, essentially agrarian civilisation, with small scale workshops, doing stuff by hand. There's lots of poetry, with people doing spontaneous performances for each other in their leisure time. But struggling to get by some of the time. The book contains an account of what happens after the Great Disruption, when most societies of the world collapsed, which is conceived as having been within the lifetimes of many of these people in the book.

It's a splendid read. For philosophers, it's charming, because Sam is continually bringing in implicitly, and mostly explicitly, the great philosophers. He's quoting or talking about Hobbes, Rousseau, Marx, and the rest. His characters sometimes offer lines of one of them to each other. And, in that sense, it's very much a novel of ideas in the tradition of utopias and dystopias.

Now, for the first two thirds one could think it's fun and interesting, but a little bit plodding. Quite a lot of it is expository, and it's not exactly driven by a brilliant narrative or by literary flair. I don't think Sam would mind me saying that. But then, two thirds of the way through, there's this enormous twist. And what I'm afraid I have to do in order to give you a sense of why the book is really, really worth reading, is to tell you what the twist is. So, this is going to be a horrible spoiler for you. But it's for the greater good.

The novel is set on an island where they're building this community of Entropia on the wreckage of industrial civilisation. What happens two thirds of the way through the novel is that, for the first time in a very long time, they get a visitor to the island who rows in a boat to them and tells them an astonishing fact. Here is where Plato comes in… This visitor says that the history of their community is based on a noble lie. And the lie is this: no collapse of civilisation has taken place. And in fact, the time

isn't the late 21st century, the time is the present day. And, actually, the experiment of Entropia started in the 1930s and 1940s, when some far-sighted people started to see that we were on the path to potential societal collapse. What they wanted to see was whether people could potentially live off the wreckage of industrial civilisation and whether people could live much more lightly on the earth.

What this visitor then says to the inhabitants of Entropia is, 'Look what we want you to do now in the early 21st century, is to come back to the world and teach people about how you've been managing to live, and explain to them that it's not going to be as terrible as they all think, and also to explain to them what it was like living in what they thought was the aftermath of the crash of industrial civilisation.'

It's an absolutely magnificent twist. It really took my breath away; and also, of course, it raises intriguing ethical issues in terms of whether a noble lie like that can ever really be noble, whether it can be justified.

That's *Entropia* in a nutshell. I hope you'll still think it worth reading—or studying you're your students, maybe, if you're a teacher—even after hearing that. I hope I've at least explained how it came to have a powerful effect on me. It is a novel of ideas supremely relevant to the situation in which we now find ourselves.

It is complicated, though, because in my experience, when you have small communities, you get the Nimby effect ('not in my back yard')—do it next door, not here. But also, trade is what has allowed for political progress historically. Trade is what's opened up channels of communication with people who would otherwise be fighting. And with trade with countries whose regimes operate in different ways, gradual change becomes possible, because of the necessity on both parts to continue to trade.

But that's what I think is hopeful again, about Latour's vision. He's saying, 'Let's not go back to some kind of pure nativism/atavism/nationalism. But let's get serious about re-localisation. Let's get serious about roots, let's get serious about place. And let's find a way in which we can combine that with retaining the best of the global', which, in my opinion, clearly includes trade where it's necessary. Bananas would be a stereotypical example. I don't want to give up bananas. They should come on a boat, for a long time to come. But I don't think it's a good idea that that all of my computers are made in China. And I want to be able to carry on communicating with people around the world. But I also want communities to be more genuine for people—for people to know their neighbours, for people not to rush around commuting so much and holidaying endlessly in distant locations.

Of course, the pandemic is interesting here. Covid-19 may be the turning point. It may be the point at which globalisation and cosmopolitanism start to go into reverse. And what I'm saying is that, if we make that change in the right manner, that could be a *good* thing. If we don't do it in a sort of simplistic globalisation-was-all-terrible kind of way. What if we thought carefully about what the good bits of industrialisation are, and the bad bits? What if we did the same with globalisation? It seems to me that making possible that kind of thinking is precisely the kind of thing that philosophers nowadays ought to be doing.

Appendix III

Review of 'Decoding Chomsky' in 'Philosophy' [2015]

Atus Mariqueo-Russell and Rupert Read review two books with interlinking subjects, Noam Chomsky's *Decoding Chomsky: Science and Revolutionary Politics* by Chris Knight and Chomsky's *What Kind of Creatures Are We?* [2016]

Two books published in late 2016 have been causing a stir: one by Noam Chomsky, and one by fellow anarchist Chris Knight about Noam Chomsky. Chomsky's *What Kind of Creatures are we?* (hereafter WKCW) is a comparatively accessible addition to his oeuvre, and a good starting point for those interested in an overview of the key features of, and motivations for, the latest iteration of his 'nativist' linguistics. WKCW? is to be commended for its effort to communicate the central concerns of the Chomskyan linguistic project in a significantly less technical format than many of Chomsky's works. Moreover, while WKCW? does not explicitly entertain or make an argument for mutually supporting qualities in common between his linguistics and politics, it is noteworthy that, after having written over 100 books, Chomsky has now decided to interweave essays on political matters with those on linguistics. This is particularly striking, given that Chris Knight's book *Decoding Chomsky* (hereafter DC) is a brilliant, if slightly harsh, disquisition that takes as its central argument the claim that Chomsky has purposefully obscured any relations between his linguistics and politics because they are in irreconcilable contradiction. Knight argues that if Chomsky were to take seriously the political ramifications of his linguistic work then he would have to concede that the funded work he undertook (particularly) in his early career was at fundamental odds with his political project of challenging US imperialism. By defining politics and linguistics as occupying different domains of thought, the latter being in the domain of science and knowledge, the former a tool of practical intelligence where expertise is not possible, Chomsky is charged with, in Knight's words, making activism mindless, and science tongue-tied (i.e. about political matters) (DC, 187). In this review we give an overview of Chomsky's new book and subject some of the claims therein to scrutiny, before assessing the merits of Knight's claims in light of Chomsky's new book.

WKCW? consists of four essays which between them address these questions, 'What is language? What are the limits of human understanding (if any)? And what is the common good to which we should strive?' (WKCW, 1). After lamenting the lack of clear definitions among those that have historically been assigned to language, and surveying a few of them, Chomsky proposes that the unique feature of language is in its alleged power to generate infinite combinations of linguistic structures despite being a feature of a finite system – the brain. This ability is central to what Chomsky terms the Basic Property of language, which he claims is its power to construct 'structured expressions that receive interpretations at two interfaces, sensorimotor for externalization and conceptual-intentional for mental processes' (WKCW, 4). It will come as no surprise that Chomsky is concerned overwhelmingly with the latter use: that which concerns mental processes and computation. He labels this computational system of language the 'I-language' and moves on to outline the mechanisms by

which it functions. Crucially, the ‘I-language’ does not account for our specific everyday use of language for communicative purposes, rather it encompasses the underlying framework from which our everyday communicative language is supposedly generated. Chomsky contrasts the ‘I-language’ with the ‘E-language’, which stands for ‘external language’ and is used for communicative rather than computational purposes.

Chomsky's reliance on a finite vs infinite distinction here is doing substantive methodological work. This distinction that plays an utterly pivotal role in the apparent force of his theorising is problematic. On page 2, he makes the remarkable claim that the human power of (he quotes Darwin here) ‘associating together the most diversified sounds and ideas’ is ‘actually infinite’. This invocation of an ‘actual infinity’ is extraordinarily bold. He goes on (WKCW, 3): ‘That infinite power rests in a finite brain.’ ‘Infinite’, he seems to have stated, means ‘actually’, in the mathematical sense ‘infinite’. But what does ‘finite’ mean, here? Finite as opposed to what? With what kind of brain is Chomsky contrasting our ‘merely’ finite brains?

One obvious possibility would be that the contrast-class is theology: that the alternative that Chomsky is imagining, an alternative infinite brain, would be the brain of gods or angels, who have the advantage of being ‘unlimited’ immaterial beings. This may seem an implausible way to interpret Chomsky, an ultra-rationalist and (presumably) atheist. But in fact, it turns out simply to be the literal meaning of his would-be claim. For on pages 28–9 he writes: ‘if we are biological organisms, not angels, then our cognitive faculties are similar to those called “physical capacities” and should be studied much as other systems of the body are.’

It seems to us unsatisfactory to define one's field of study by contrast with something that is less false than systematically unclear. But perhaps Chomsky has much higher regard than we do for theology. Perhaps he thinks that traditional theology makes perfectly good sense, only it happens to be (provably?) false?

Chomsky famously uses a distinction made by Charles Sanders Peirce between ‘problems’ and ‘mysteries’, the former being composed of those intellectual endeavours that fall within the scope of human cognitive capacities, the latter are those questions that are beyond the scope of these capacities. (At page 27, Chomsky insists that reliance on the distinction, and acceptance of there being ‘mysteries’, is a truism. This is an example of a rhetorical manoeuvre repeatedly undertaken in this book, a manoeuvre which it is unfortunate to find being made by one who claims to believe in free and open inquiry; the manoeuvre of labelling his own claims as so self-evidently true that anyone questioning them must be congenitally confused. Chomsky leaves alarmingly little room for civilised discussion. This seems an authoritarianism ill-befitting an anarchist.). Chomsky claims that the human mind has a limited array of ‘admissible hypotheses’ that structure our scientific inquiry and cognitive attainments, and that this is just a fact of biology: ‘the structural properties that provide scope also set limits’ (WKCW, 30). The ramifications of this are that there exists a rather large set of knowledge that is unattainable to us because of the limits to our computational system. In defence of this, Chomsky notes that generally theorists hold the human brain to a different explanatory standard than other parts of the body when it comes to hypotheses about innateness. He suggests that the ‘gut brain’ that

vertebrates possess, and that is capable of mediating parts of our body's functioning without input from the brain in our heads, never has questions raised about its innateness. Chomsky attributes this double-standard to a ‘methodological dualism’, which is in his view unjustified given that different biological ‘organs’ ought to be treated with the same explanatory methodology.

If we accept that knowledge acquisition is based on innate faculties as opposed to socially constructed belief-systems then Chomsky believes that we can identify that there are inevitably cognitive limits to human understanding. This view is mutually supportive of Chomsky's relegation of the role of communication to being a secondary externalisation of the underlying language faculty. For if communication were central to the shaping of the language faculty, and that faculty is in turn central to computation, then explanatory methodologies would be forced to account for the role that ‘external’ social influences have upon the development of the language computational function.

However, Chomsky's methodology risks being scientistic, in the following sense; Chomsky takes mysteries to be problems that are beyond us. Problems that it just so happens our cognitive architecture is not suitable for solving. But this ignores another conceptual possibility: that there may be philosophical ‘issues’ that are not problems at all, neither soluble by us nor insoluble by us. (This thought is integral to Wittgenstein's philosophy. Perhaps we set ourselves insoluble ‘problems’, the right way of responding to which is to seek to see how they might turn out not to be problems at all, when they are re-viewed. What isn't dreamt of in Chomsky's philosophy is that there are questions which turn out not to be problems at all, because they haven't so much as been framed. These, we need freeing from.) The prejudice that anything which can seemingly be stated as a problem actually is a problem is a scientistic prejudice: one that sees only scientific problems, problems that can be solved either by us or by beings we might imagine with greater cognitive powers than us (aliens – or, better still, angels). This is a monistic way of seeing, one that doesn't consider the possibility of other ways of thinking, such as philosophical ways (and aesthetic ways, and so on).

Moreover, there is a peculiarity to Chomsky's way of handling the ‘gut-brain’, one that follows directly from the way in which his idea of studying our physical capacities is given its sense only by contrast with some fantasised study of infinite purely mental/spiritual capacities (i.e. those of supernatural agents). It is this: Chomsky presumes we should regard the gut brain as obviously simply part of the gut, understood in some narrowly physico-biologistic terms (WKCW, 29–30). And he presumes we should by analogy regard the brain as simply a kind of better version of the gut-brain, one with different and more expansive built-in limitations, but still strictly limited. But these presumptions ignore another possibility: that the gut-brain should be considered truly a part of one's identity. A necessary sub-component of the organism; and the organism in turn a sub-component of the community.

Chomsky thinks we should reduce the brain to being like the gut-brain (only: less limited than it). But why not proceed the other way around? Why not take the gut-brain as being surprisingly like the brain? Why not take seriously that the gut inflects who we are? That it enables, rather than merely constraining. That people without guts (the phrase is telling; does our language know things that Chomsky has forgotten?) wouldn't really be people at all – and not ‘merely’ because they could not

digest food. What if the gut-brain is part of what it is to be human, and has light shed on it by the brain, and sheds light too on the brain? Try seeing the gut-brain as more brain embodied, and brain as a way of understanding person – rather than simply as part of a biological organ.

This kind of possibility is being taken increasingly seriously in biology, and indeed in broader humanistic thinking. Chomsky's completely ignoring it, in the service of a physicalistic 'biologism' that appears to regret that we are not pure disembodied beings, is telling. (As Chomsky is quoted by Knight at his book on page 158: linguistic 'imperfections may have to do with the need to "externalise" language. If we could communicate by telepathy, they would not arise.' So that's alright then.)

Such regret also leads to the serious risk of Chomsky placing 'in the head' things that are surely in part contingent, culturally-variable, etc. Here is an example, cited by Knight at on page 163 of his book; 'There's a fixed and quite rich structure of understanding associated with the concept "house" and that's going to be cross-linguistic and it's going to arise independently of any evidence because it's just part of our nature.' This might be a surprising conclusion, to some nomads or forest-dwellers.

Having defined language as at its core a computational device that merely happens to be physically embodied, Chomsky then turns his attention to convincing the reader of the innateness of that device. He claims that 'I-language' is generated by a genetic endowment, which he calls Universal Grammar. To support the claim that what sits behind our communicative language usage is a computational language, and that what sits behind the computational structure is a genetic endowment, Chomsky draws the reader's attention to what he identifies as shared structural features across all 'E-languages'. While Chomsky does concede that field linguists have discovered a few counterexamples to the shared structural features that he pins his argument to, he does not think that those counterexamples refute the validity of his project. Instead all they show, he says, is that the postulated structure of Universal Grammar may need some tweaking or expanding (22).

Because computation allegedly precedes communication, Chomsky argues that 'I-languages' are far richer in terms of content than 'E-languages', claiming that 'Externalisation is rarely used. Most use of language use by far is never externalized' (WKCW, 14, sic). One curious feature of Chomsky's nativist linguistics then is that it relegates communication to a non-integral part of language. Indeed, communication does not seem to be necessary to formulate an 'I-language', and even those animals that use phonetic or signing communication, Chomsky believes, do not possess the underlying 'I-language' that is needed for those utterances to qualify as 'language' (WKCW, 42). This leaves Chomskyans in the strange position of having to accept that the ability to communicate is not necessary to have language use and nor is it sufficient to qualify as having language use.[1]

It is important to be clear on this point. The true radicalism – or extremism, if you prefer – of Chomsky's position, well understood by Knight, but not appreciated by many, is that language is fundamentally nothing to do with communication. Language, according to Chomsky, is basically about one person thinking to themselves. This is a radically Cartesian vision.

The alternatives to it – such as Merleau-Pontyan or Lakoffian emphasis on our mobility and embodiedness, Wittgensteinian emphasis on our forms of life as largely constitutive of our capacity for

thought, or Arendtian emphasis on thinking itself as quintessentially socio-political – are not considered by Chomsky. Arendt or Rush Rhees would claim that you can't in the end keep the most ‘basic’ of language apart from conversation, dialogue. That how we think as individuals inherently involves our being parts of collectivities.

Knight takes up a further such alternative to Chomsky's methodological solipsism. He cleverly juxtaposes Marx's prioritising of life over consciousness, matter over mind and practice over theory against the Chomskyan ‘Cognitive Revolution’ (DC, 192). He makes the intriguing claim that the latter turned out to be the decisive throw of American anti-Marxism.

Chomsky states that the way that the brain ‘secretes’ consciousness is ‘inconceivable to us, but that is not a fact abuot the external world but about our conscious limitations’ (WKCW, 35). But perhaps it need not be inconceivable to us when we see ourselves, as Knight does, as social, acting, moving creatures. Rather than as isolated chunks of matter, each chunk spectating a world ‘external’ to itself.

Chomsky imagines a God's eye view that would enable that eye to see the answer to all problems, to know everything. He appears to think that this conception makes perfect sense; a questionable claim which he does not appear to realise is a claim at all (He in effect treats it, to use his phrase, as a ‘truism’). He bars humanity from this knowledge. But, in the act of such barring, he tacitly nevertheless arrogates to himself a God's eye-view: because he thinks that he can see both sides of the limit. He thinks that he can describe what it would be for us to not be limited in the way that we are. The situation is precisely that observed by Wittgenstein, when he remarked that people like to talk about the limits of knowledge, because they secretly imagine, when they do so, that they can see over those limits…

Let us turn to what Chomsky says about the emergence of language itself. Drawing on the work of the human evolutionary scientist Ian Tattersall, who claims that language was likely acquired suddenly around 50,000–100,000 years ago, Chomsky argues that any attempt at understanding language evolution must account for the emergence of the Basic Property. It is, Chomsky claims, difficult to see how the Basic Property central to Chomskyan linguistics could have evolved over time, given its computational and allegedly ‘infinite’ nature. Explanations of language evolution would seem to be naturally more favourable to referentialist accounts of language use, as it is easier to postulate the gradual emergence of signs and phonetic utterances gradually becoming associated with ever more complex communicative functions. It may be this seemingly easier compatibility of evolution with referentialism that leads Chomsky to attack gradual evolutionary accounts before moving onto arguing that referentialist accounts of language use are implausible. Of particular interest is his idea that evolutionary theories fail to account for the basic structure that is common to (nearly?) all human languages, and the fact that non-human animal communication appears to be referentialist while lacking in the computational structure that is common to human languages (WKCW, 41). If we accept that language is likely to have evolved suddenly, probably in a single mutation, and that referentialism is an implausible theory to account for our language use, then Chomsky's nativist linguistics may prove convincing. However, there are serious difficulties accepting such a claim. One specific such difficulty is in taking Chomsky's own proposal of it is as a scientific claim at all. In a 2008 interview, cited by Knight

(DC, 166), Chomsky places the claim into the ever-widening class of ‘truisms’. He argues that the claim that language arose in one sudden step is ‘not even controversial enough to require empirical test.’ Interestingly, in his new book, he has somewhat dampened that claim, describing it as the product of what ‘the very limited empirical evidence indicates’ (WKCW, 3). Such a dampening may possibly even be a response to his reading Knight's manuscript, alongside the arguments of other critical authors, who have increasingly questioned the rationality of speculating a single evolutionary mutation underlying language use.

By contrast, Knight develops a passionate account of the politically-engaged scientific research about the evolution of language of Sarah Hrdy et al, and their postulation of an originary ‘human revolution’ that saw both our radically overcoming the individualism of primates in favour of an egalitarian society and our developing language. The Hrdy-Knight claim is that the two events were part and parcel of one historical trajectory, two sides of the same coin. We find the account pretty convincing, and certainly more convincing than Chomsky's peculiar claim that language was a random once-only mutation in some one individual's skull, a mutation which allegedly had such extraordinary selective advantage that all humans subsequently allegedly descend from this one lucky individual.

We disagree with Knight only when he takes his argument further than he needs to, feeling obliged to dress it up in the terms of science just as Chomsky did. Knight writes (DC, 233) that ‘the language of science’ is humanity's only ‘common tongue’. But this is dangerous monistic rhetoric – and moreover it's false. Philosophy is our oldest common tongue.

Knight's ‘Decoding Chomsky’ is nevertheless a well-researched explanation as to why Chomsky has historically presented his linguistics as an enigmatically insular science devoid of any real-world application. Knight argues persuasively that the reason Chomsky refuses to politicise his linguistics is because if he were to do so then the resulting ideology would be counter to his anarcho-syndicalist politics (which Knight is broadly supportive of). Moreover, Knight gives us an historical analysis of the ascent of Chomsky's linguistic rationalism to almost complete-dominance in the linguistics field, while highlighting the social and political conditions underlying that startling rise to supremacy.

The central thesis of Knight's book is that in response to competing ideological and institutional pressures, Chomsky was psychologically forced into segmenting his politics from his linguistics. Knight wants, ‘to serve justice on Chomsky the scientist without doing an injustice to Chomsky the conscience of America’ (DC, xii–xiii). He comes up with some intriguing examples of the danger inherent in the segmentation that he sees Chomsky as having conducted. Consider:

During the student upheavals at MIT in the late 1960s, Chomsky endorsed the MIT management line that development of weapons of mass destruction – research into their design – was perfectly acceptable, provided it was kept separate from subsequent deployment of such weapons. This distinction – which to my mind uncannily recalls Chomsky's distinction between ‘competence’ and ‘performance’ – met with considerable opposition from colleagues on the political left [such as Howard Zinn] (DC, 197).

We agree with Knight that Chomsky's politics is mainly splendid. Where we disagree with Chomsky (and agree with Knight in the criticism) is in his thinking that he has meanwhile put linguistics on a natural-scientific footing. Where we disagree with Knight (and would agree with Chomsky in the criticism) is in his thinking that linguistics is properly primarily a social science.

What neither Knight nor Chomsky consider is the possibility of linguistics beyond scientism no matter of what kind. Ultimately, we suspect, and hope to have sketched, that most of the recalcitrant ‘problems’ of linguistics are at root philosophical. Which, we have suggested, following Wittgenstein, means that some of them turn out not properly to be problems at all, not even ‘mystery’-problems.

[1] It may also explain why Chomsky isn't a vegetarian given that communication is often cited as proof of non-human animal intelligence.