The Schumacher Institute

Bookchin, Degrowth and Libertarian Municipalism: A Blueprint for a New Environmentalism?

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Introduction

"The contradiction between the exploitative organization of society and the natural environment is beyond co-optation: the atmosphere, the waterways, the soil, and the ecology required for human survival are not redeemable by reforms, concessions or modifications of strategic policy" - Murray Bookchin, *Post -Scarcity Anarchism (1971).*[1]

Murray Bookchin's concept of 'Libertarian Municipalism' aimed to establish communal self-management and modes of production based on localisation and self-sufficiency, fundamentally reorienting the relationship between man and nature. Encompassing a multidisciplinary framework that spanned history, economics, ecology and philosophy, Bookchin's political and social ecology advocated that human beings understand themselves not as separate from nature but dependent on it for their survival and that they view nature not as a resource to be exploited, but an entity with which to coexist.[2] Therefore, his opposition to capital accumulation, carbon-intensive global trade, economic growth, and to the destruction of variety in all forms through specialisation and urbanisation entailed a revolutionary reconsideration of preexisting economic and social modalities.[3] The reintegration of man with nature and the decoupling of notions of 'prosperity' from material wellbeing and productivity allowed Bookchin to formulate visions of technology and economics as means for achieving human flourishing in the Aristotelian manner, rather than subjecting all human and environmental relations to the dictates of supply and demand.[4] The Aristotelian conception of flourishing, or all-encompassing

1 Murray Bookchin, Post-Scarcity Anarchism, Ramparts Press (1971)

2 Janet Biehl, The Murray Bookchin Reader, Black Rose Books, New York (1999)

3 ibid

4 https://libcom.org/blog/murray-bookchins-libertarian-technics-11032014

happiness achieved for its own sake rather than for a specific economic goal, was the driving force behind Bookchin's conception of the function of economics.

For Bookchin, it was immoral to conceive of technology as a tool for facilitating the profit-led growth imperative and expansion of the hierarchical domination of man over nature; it was imperative to consider the moral and ethical frameworks that mediated the productive process, obtaining an idea of why things were produced, not merely how.[5] Therefore, he resolutely opposed the regimentation and alienation of labour imposed by specialisation and the system of capital accumulation that prioritised decoupling humans from the products of their labour. It is here that the relevance of Bookchin's thought to the modern idea of 'degrowth' is pertinent; although he did not use the term, his advocacy for small scale, localised production and the repudiation of the capitalist ideology that portrays the environment as a resource to be exploited has been echoed by modern 'degrowth' theorists such as George Monbiot and Jason Hickel. Unlike the mainstream elements of the environmentalist movement, the concept of degrowth rejects the hierarchical relationship between man and nature, emphasising detachment from not only laissez-faire, 'free market' economics, but the reductive state utilitarianism that characterised many 20th Century planned economies. These conceptions can be characterised as 'ecomodernist', which means that they advocate an 'absolute decoupling' of economic growth and human activity from environmental degradation and green technology such as solar and wind power to reorient the capitalist economy in an environmental direction.

This project will focus on 'degrowth' as an alternative to the aforementioned narratives concerning 'absolute decoupling' of technological innovation from environmental degradation, arguing that Bookchin's ideas of local communitarianism are far more effective in alleviating the climate crisis than ecomodernism. It will also provide an analysis of various degrowth-inspired policy initiatives proposed by Giorgios Kallis, arguing that new indicators of prosperity and human wellbeing are necessary if we are to restructure our lives around ecological ways of living.[6]

Part 1 of this project will focus on the corrosive impact of capital accumulation and economic growth on variety both in the environment and in the human labour process. It will examine how increasing specialisation and economies of scale have allowed firms to drive down costs of production, precipitating the greenhouse effect

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5 https://libcom.org/blog/murray-bookchins-libertarian-technics-11032014

6 https://degrowth.org/2015/05/15/yes-we-can-prosper-without-growth/

and leading to unprecedented levels of planned obsolescence.[7] Part 2 will criticise ecomodernism and the suggestion that 'green tech' can yield solutions to the climate crisis, arguing instead that the bottlenecks imposed by 'Jevons' Paradox' (which holds that environment benefits accruing from increases in technological efficiency are soon offset by increased consumption) renders much of it superfluous.[8] Part 3 will focus on the benefits of small scale agriculture and husbandry, scaling back the influence of the World Bank, IMF, EU and WTO, and promoting localisation over globalisation.

PART 1—CAPITAL ACCUMULATION AND THE EXTINCTION OF VARIEGATION

The imperative of endless, profit-driven growth and the high rates of consumption that this requires have had a significantly damaging impact upon the finite resources of the planet, which cannot withstand the incessant expansion and exploitation that most countries are unwilling to reverse. For example, Jason Hickel estimates that we can use 50 BN tons of the Earth's material, minerals and life forms per year to maintain sustainability, yet we currently use 80 BN per year.[9] Furthermore, a team of scientists led by Monike Dittrich found that if current trends continue, growth will drive global resource use to 180 BN tons per year by 2050.[10] The Global Footprint Network has also estimated that we use 1.5 planets' worth of resources each year and that if everyone on the planet consumed at the rate of the average American, we would use 5 planets' worth each year.[11]

Much of the coverage of the climate crisis has focussed exclusively on fossil fuel usage and the culpability of fossil fuel companies. The problem lies far deeper than that; the underlying economic structures of competition and the constant need to produce on a higher scale in the interests of driving down costs and maximising profits incentivise environmental deterioration.[12] Many large multinational corporations, including Nike

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7 https://monthlyreview.org/2018/05/01/the-physics-of-capitalism/

8 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jevons_paradox

9 https://www.fastcompany.com/40548564/better-technology-isnt-the-solution-to-ecological-collapse

10 Schandl, H, Hatfield-Dodds, S, Wiedmann, T et al. (7 more authors) (2016) Decoupling global environmental pressure and economic growth: Scenarios for energy use, materials use and carbon emissions. Journal of Cleaner Production, 132.

11 WWF. 2018. Living Planet Report - 2018: Aiming Higher. Grooten, M. and Almond, R.E.A.(Eds). WWF, Gland, Switzerland.

12 https://monthlyreview.org/2018/05/01/the-physics-of-capitalism/

and Ford, have announced 'green' initiatives involving decarbonisation in an attempt to appear as altruistic as possible while continuing to do immense damage to the environment through proliferating sweatshops and factories, which they are required to do to maintain competitive levels of production and profitability. Planned obsolescence, deforestation and the creation of immense waste, that harm the carbon-sequestering abilities of the soil and drive out variegation from ecosystems, are not anomalous instances of anti-environmental practices by otherwise ethical multinational companies, but are ingrained within the internal logic of the capitalist mode of production, and must be curtailed through a fundamental restructuring of the economy if the climate crisis is to be averted. The growth imperative is driven by factors other than productivity or capital accumulation; there are cultural and social factors fueling the rampant consumerism present in many countries, but these are beyond the scope of this project.

The subjection of agriculture to the dictates of the 'free' market, entailing deforestation and desertification of grasslands, has meant that an estimated 24% of global gas emissions come directly from the farm sector.[13] The bourgeoning agribusiness sector, which now accounts for around 10% of global consumer spending and employing around 2 BN people, is responsible for the rapid intensification of land use which has caused a significant increase in the amount of land that has come under human influence, along with a spike in CHG emissions.[14] An IPCC report found that, between 2007 and 2016, agriculture and deforestation were responsible for 23% of CHG emissions, output with the potential to rival fossil fuel emissions.[15] Moreover, the carbon-sequestering abilities of the soil, which could otherwise mitigate or help to reverse some of the worst agricultural repercussions of the climate crisis, are severely compromised by the extractive and mechanising measures undertaken by profiteering large corporations. Soil remains the second largest carbon sink after the oceans and can store three times as much carbon as is found in the atmosphere.[16] Any policy initiative geared towards using existing systems to decelerate the impact of carbon on

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[13] *IPCC, 2014: Climate Change 2014: Mitigation of Climate Change. Contribution of Working Group III to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*

[14] *ibid*

[15] *IPCC, 2018: Global Warming of 1.5°C.An IPCC Special Report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels and related global greenhouse gas emission pathways, in the context of strengthening the global response to the threat of climate change, sustainable development, and efforts to eradicate poverty*

[16] *https://www.eea.europa.eu/signals/signals-2015/articles/soil-and-climate-change*

the environment and to reverse environmental degradation, therefore, must account for the centrality of carbon-sequestration to the reduction of emissions by 2050, as the UK Climate Change Committee has.[17]

An example of the corrosive impact of the profit-driven growth imperative and consequent economies of scale on the environment is the use of slash-and-burn agricultural techniques by small farmers and ranchers, who clear deforested plots to make way for more land, releasing vast amounts of CO2 into the atmosphere. The imperative of growth and the satisfaction of global demand for several commodities such as cocoa and palm oil from the Amazon, for instance, has accelerated the deforestation of Randonia and the expansion of World Bank-funded, capital-intensive infrastructural projects such as Highway BR 364.[18] Large-scale, highly industrialised production of certain cash crops and capital-intensive projects have replaced smaller-scale, labour-intensive, traditional modes of agricultural production in Brazil. Consequently, rising land prices and decreased demand for rural workers have concentrated large amounts of people in major cities, expanding the favelas and alienating vast swathes of the population who were once self-sufficient, and are now dependent on large corporations for a livelihood.[19]

Murray Bookchin argued that the separation of town and countryside and regimentation of people in mechanised, densified towns required the industrialisation of agriculture, with large areas of land cultivating a single crop. The volume and efficiency of production could be increased through intensive specialisation, coupled with the use of pesticides and chemicals. Bookchin summarised the impact of capitalist atomisation and accumulation on agriculture by stating:

"The real symbol of agriculture is not the sickle (or for that matter the tractor) but the aeroplane. The modern food cultivator is represented not by the peasant, yeoman, or even the agronomist… but the pilot and chemist, for whom soil is a mere resource, an inorganic raw material."[20]

The mechanisation of agriculture and proliferation of the growth imperative, therefore, had ramifications that went beyond the economy; human beings themselves

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[17] Reducing UK emissions 2019 Progress Report to Parliament Committee on Climate Change July 2019

18 https://www.jacobinmag.com/2019/09/amazon-rainforest-fires-capitalism-brazil-bolsonaro

19 https://www.jacobinmag.com/2019/09/amazon-rainforest-fires-capitalism-brazil-bolsonaro

20 Bookchin, Anarchism

were alienated from the processes that produced their food and disconnected from the interplay between humanity and the environment. As variegation has become systematically expunged from the lives of people, so too has it been extinguished from the environment, as landscapes have become dominated by motorways and unsightly, brutalist architectural blocks. The concentration of people in densely packed urban areas and simplification of the materials that construct the buildings in which they live represents the encroachment of the inorganic into the organic, and the alienation of man from the natural world.[21] As has been established from the case of Brazil's 'rural exodus', large cities drain surrounding rural areas of labour and material due not only from the competition that renders traditional agriculture and husbandry unprofitable but from the requirements of large supplies of coal and petroleum for their sprawling populations.[22]

The impact of continuous growth for its own sake and the consequent separation of town and countryside provided, for Bookchin, an incentive for humans to reconnect with agriculture through small-scale farming projects that allowed machinery to be spread over long distances, and for nature to be cultivated in such a way that would promote the diversity of species and crops. The reconnection of town with country, and the decentralisation of the productive forces, would facilitate, in Bookchin's terms, "*the humanisation of nature by the technician and the naturalisation of society by the biologist.*"[23] In other words, people who would never previously have engaged with farming or horticulture would be given the opportunity to understand the importance of careful cultivation of the soil by humans. Abolishing specialisation in agriculture would necessitate abolishing specialisation within human societies.

Economist E.J. Mishan recognised that the external social costs of traffic congestion and urbanisation in cities built for motorists and not pedestrians were not accounted for by metrics which prioritised low costs and high levels of efficiency over human wellbeing. Arguing that: *"In all that contributes in trivial ways to his ultimate satisfaction, man has ample choice… In all that destroys his enjoyment of life, he has none,"* Mishan recognised the flaws in the reduction of progress and prosperity to quantitative characteristics such as productivity and growth.[24] Material prosperity was not at all correlated with, and was oftentimes diametrically opposed to human dignity, as

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[21] *ibid*

22 ibid

23 ibid

24 E.J. Mishan, The Costs of Economic Growth, Pelican Books (1969)

economic cost-benefit forms of analysis can only measure the market value of goods, services and policy prescriptions, failing to account for either their environmental externalities or their social costs.

The positivist interpretation of prosperity that reduces products of labour and nature to a profit calculus is currently inescapable, even within much of environmentalist discourse at the present. 'Green growth' and the assumption that 'market-based solutions' must be sought for environmental problems, allowing for the continuation of profit maximisation by large corporations, is symptomatic of the corrosion of mainstream political thought by what Mark Fisher termed 'Capitalist Realism': the idea that put bluntly, *there is no alternative.*[25] I intend to elaborate upon this in the next section, which will deal with the ecomodernist ideology and its adherents' blind acceptance of the confines of the capitalist system.

In sum, the very notion of economic growth and the doubling of the economy every two decades represents a significant threat to the environment. The underlying logic of capitalism, which Engels termed the 'anarchy of competition' allows no scope for decentralisation or environmental consideration in the organisation of the economy. The industrialisation of agriculture and specialisation of production attest to this. The displacement of the self-sufficient, local farmer by the alienated, urban wage-labourer, coupled with the proliferation of cash crops and World Bank funded infrastructure projects threatens to use up our planet's resources and to create environmental chaos from which we may never recover.

PART 2 — ECOMODERNISM: A MEASURED CRITIQUE

Within the political sphere, the way in which environmental issues and responses to the climate crisis have been framed has prioritised social-democratic, Keynesian reformism over genuine, substantive change. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's 'Green New Deal' and Labour's 'Green Industrial Revolution' have sought to expand nationalisation and progressive taxation with the goal of electrifying transport, insulating homes and providing jobs.[26] This type of reformism remains wedded to the prevailing doctrines of continuous growth and the ability of "green tech" to achieve net-zero carbon emissions by 2030, demonstrating the continued prevalence of 'ecomodernism' among mainstream environmentalist movements at the policy level.

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25 Mark Fisher, Capitalist Realism, Zero Books (2009)

26 https://www.viewpointmag.com/2019/10/24/green-new-deal-for-what/

The central tenets of the ecomodernist ideology: that it is possible to achieve an 'absolute decoupling' of economic activity from environmental degradation, and that 'green growth' and investment in new technologies will reduce the intensity and the volume of fossil fuel emissions, operate within preexisting economic orthodoxies. The authors of the 2015 'Ecomodernist Manifesto' fail to recognise the costs and rebound effects of the implementation of green technologies, and remain wedded to a linear historical narrative of technology-driven 'progress', in which the inefficient, undynamic Global South need only adopt the technology of the most advanced countries to improve, and in which man has an unshakeable hierarchy over nature.

These assumptions are thoroughly refuted by a plethora of evidence, which concludes that an 'absolute decoupling' cannot possibly take place in the time frame required to resolve the worst effects of the climate crisis and that the adoption of green tech will only mitigate the climate crisis in the short term, facilitating the externalisation of costs onto poorer countries and onto the environment itself. For example, 2 degrees C of global warming is considered to be a 'safe limit' by many environmental scientists (some state that it is lower than this), with an atmospheric CO2 concentration of around 350 ppm (parts per million).[27] At current rates of CO2 emissions, the Earth will have warmed to 3 degrees C by 2050, causing mass flooding, droughts, and potentially creating hundreds of millions of environmental refugees. If the economy continues to grow at 3% per annum (which it must do to avoid a recession), the stabilisation of the climate at 2 degrees C will require the intensity of carbon emissions to decline by 8.5%, which is unheard of for any form of technology.[28]

Furthermore, China and India remain the world's largest CO2 emitters, and they have reserved the right to continue using fossil fuels, albeit at a slightly reduced intensity.[29] This demonstrates that even in the most ideal of hypothetical scenarios, in which few barriers exist to the adoption of the Green New Deal and external environmentally damaging factors such as war are omitted, achieving an 'absolute decoupling' of human economic activity from environmental damage is effectively an impossible task. Achieving climate stabilisation within the 21st Century and reducing the level of CO2 in the atmosphere is evidently completely beyond the capabilities of the ecomodernists in this scenario. Between 2004 and 2014, during a period of relative environmental consciousness, in which governments were largely aware of the extent

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[27] *Review of Radical Political Economics 43(3) 289–301 © 2011 Union for Radical Political Economics*

[28] *ibid*

[29] *https://www.activesustainability.com/environment/top-5-most-polluting-countries/*

of the climate crisis, a global GDP increase of 44% was enough to precipitate a 19% increase in fossil fuel consumption and a 22% increase in fossil fuel emissions.[30]

Labour's Green Industrial Revolution is based around the electrification of transport and the revivification of solar and wind power.[31] The costs of establishing such technologies, in addition to the requirements of large-scale extraction, imply that they will likely offset any environmental benefits they may have had if they are implemented. For example, for the UK to meet electric car targets by 2050 would require global cobalt production to double and rare metals to be mined out of the ground at 12 times the current rate between now and then.[32] The required expansion of mining and agriculture needed for biofuel extraction, both of which rely on the exploitation of resources in the Global South, will likely necessitate competition between countries in a manner similar to the 19th Century 'Scramble for Africa'. 58% of Cobalt is currently mined in the Congo, which is one of the 10 most polluted areas in the world.[33]

The ecomodernists and architects of the social-democratic reformism, therefore, are incognizant of the interconnectedness of the global economy; any proposal will require some level of input, and if this input is extractive or capital-intensive, it is reasonable to deduce that it will require environmentally harmful methods to achieve the proposal. The superiority of degrowth over ecomodernism lies in the fact that degrowth utilises existing methods and techniques that are labour-intensive and low in throughput to achieve its goals, such as subsistence farming and work-sharing. 'Degrowth' strategies exist outside of the capitalist paradigm and do not concern themselves with the need for productivity and profitability. At current rates, a replacement of 5% of existing energy infrastructure which reduces emissions intensity by 50% will only reduce overall emissions intensity by 2.5% *each year*, which is less than what is required to stabilise the climate at the 350 ppm objective.[34]

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[30] *Max Roser (2020) - "Economic Growth". Published online at OurWorldInData.org. Retrieved from: 'https://ourworldindata.org/economic-growth' [Online Resource]*

[31] *https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5991db18e4fcb524946fb639/t/5a0da5d971c10be9f571ca23/1510843866933/PB_SustainableEconomy_JW_DWO.pdf*

[32] *https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/jan/05/cutting-cobalt-challenge-battery-industry-electric-cars-congo*

[33] *https://enoughproject.org/wp-content/uploads/PoweringDownCorruption_Enough_Oct2018-web.pdf*

[34] *Review of Radical Political Economics 43(3) 289–301 © 2011 Union for Radical Political Economics*

Moreover, it is widely presumed by ecomodernists that climate breakdown constitutes a 'market failure' that can be redressed because it can be 'externalised'. It is presumed that if a policy requires mining scarce resources, then as the resources become scarcer, prices will rise and this will disincentivise their use, but this is demonstrably untrue. In the interest of maximising profits, many businesses will choose to maintain the use of scarce resources to avoid paying for more expensive, greener technologies.

In 1972, the Club of Rome published their 'Limits to Growth' report, which concluded that economic and population growth on a planet with finite resources would precipitate a "sudden and uncontrollable decline" in population and industrial capacity after 2072.[35] In 2005, a 30-year update was published, which argued that in an 'overshooting' economy in which resources are depleted faster than many can be replenished, continuous growth can only create bottlenecks that will offset any potential environmental improvements caused by the implementation of new technologies. The costs of such technologies, delays in their availability, and the need for new populations to retrain, and natural resources to be renewed meant that the pursuit of growth raised the risk of overshooting even in the event of technological change.[36]

We have already established how the electrification of transport in Britain as part of the Green Industrial Revolution will necessitate the increase of mining in the Congo. Environmental externalities from 'green' technologies also occur because they increase consumption, as is stipulated by 'Jevons Paradox', which holds that resource-efficient technologies cause an increase in demand, which leads to more damage to the environment and cancels out the benefits of using them. For example, technological advancements facilitating iron production with less coal would lead to lower prices and rising demand, causing increased consumption to render it meaningless.[37] Hypothetically, it may be affordable to cut pollutants per car in half, but if the number of cars then doubles, pollutants will have to be cut in half again to

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[35] *Meadows, Dennis. "30-Year Update of Limits to Growth finds global society in "Overshoot," Foresees social, economic, and environmental decline" (PDF)*

36 Donella Meadows and Jorgen Randers, 'Limits to Growth: A 30-year update" Earthscan Ltd (2005)

37 https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2010/12/20/the-efficiency-dilemma

maintain the same air quality. If the amount of cars doubles three times, pollutants will have to be cut by 87.5% to maintain the same air quality.[38]

The 'Limits to Growth update assumed that a given capital stock in the year 2000 emitted 1000 units of pollution, but technology improved by 4% each year, factoring in for 20-year delays in implementation.[39] In this scenario, underlying growth in industrial production would be diverted to agriculture, to compensate for acid rainfall, and fertilisers would have to be used to substitute for microbes poisoned by pesticides. Eventually, the report found, deterioration in land fertility and the loss of arable land to erosion and urban/industrial expansion would precipitate a decline in production after 2070.[40] The World 3 model was a best-case scenario for the world as it currently exists, due to it not factoring in external, environmentally damaging events such as war, strikes, corruption, flooding, earthquakes and eruptions or nuclear disasters.[41]

The aforementioned evidence attests to the nature of technology as a force that can only serve the goals of the society into which it is introduced, and can only facilitate the advancements and the progression that are permissible within that society. In other words, technology is not an instant solution to every problem faced by humanity, but it is a reflection of the wider social and economic values that society has decided are worth fulfilling. If a society is geared towards the pursuit of endless, profit-driven growth to satiate large corporations and the promotion of increased consumption, then technology cannot mitigate this on its own. It requires a reorientation of priorities; a recognition that unless the underlying mode of production in the economy is changed, no amount of innovation will magically solve the climate crisis.

Murray Bookchin understood that technology is a means to the end of human flourishing, rather than an end in itself, arguing that a difference existed between the 'modern' conception of technology, which viewed raw materials and machines exclusively as devices to be used for the production of commodities, and the classical conception, which regarded such machines and materials as part of a broader ethical

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38 Meadows, Growth

39 ibid

40 ibid

41 ibid

context.[42] Bookchin invoked Aristotle, who stated that it was imperative to ask 'why' a commodity was produced, not merely 'how', and that the process of production and the adoption of technology occurred within an all-encompassing human experience in which man became the master of his craft, and understood how to use the production process to help him live an ethical and worthwhile life.[43] In differentiating between the 'master workers' who understood that their work was accompanied by moral responsibility and the 'subordinates' who only viewed their tools and machines as parts of the process of commodity production, Aristotle recognised that the productive process included the subject (the worker) and not merely the object (the commodity/technology).

Reconnecting the worker with the tools and machinery, and counteracting the alienation imposed by an economic system that prioritises exchange-value over use-value was an important element of Bookchin's thought. Its implications for the modern environmentalist movement are clear; if people can view materially satisfying work as an enjoyable and life-affirming process, and social and ethical good, it can help to form a new conception of wellbeing that is conducive to an 'economy of enough' rather than an 'economy of more'. If technology is utilised not as a means of creating growth and solving all of humanity's problems but as something that facilitates an ethical life, there will be no need to put all of our hopes in green tech to alleviate the climate crisis; we can use it to provide for the needs of everyone while adopting more self-sufficient lifestyles.

In sum, the ecomodernist ideal of an absolute decoupling of economic growth from environmental impact is a demonstrable fallacy, as the available evidence shows that in the event of an optimal usage of technology, the costs and delays in implementation, coupled with the increased consumption which typically accompanies falling prices, will be enough to counterbalance these benefits. The Green New Deal and Green Industrial Revolution, predicated on reliance on green tech and merely tinkering around the edges of the capitalist system, will require inordinate amounts of mining and biofuel extraction to occur, which will accelerate pollution and harm the economies of the Global South. Therefore, meaningful climate action will necessitate a new conception of the relationship between man and technology and between man and work, viewing technology as a means of achieving an ethical and plentiful existence for everybody, rather than as a tool to further the growth imperative.

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[42] *Murray Bookchin, 'The Ecology of Freedom' Cheshire Books Inc. (1982)*

[43] *ibid*

PART 3 — BLUEPRINTS FOR A NEW ENVIRONMENTALISM

It is often presumed by ecomodernists such as Robert Pollin that degrowth and localisation are regressive methodologies for dealing with the climate crisis that entails a return to primitive subsistence farming and depriving poorer countries of crucial resources and technologies. Pollin, writing that *"the immediate effect of any global GDP contraction would be huge job losses and declining living standards for working people and the poor"* fails to account for the potential of small-scale agriculture and horticulture to provide jobs and assumes that prosperity is intrinsically linked to GDP.[44] In fact, the harmonisation of agriculture with industry and restructuring of our economies along the principle of production for need and not profit could if done properly, create material prosperity for all, combined with the reintegration of humanity with nature.

Dealing first with the argument that localisation will inevitably exacerbate the conditions of poorer countries, the assumption that it is only capital-intensive, large-scale projects that can help the Global South implies a linear and determinist notion of 'progress' that forces the Western definition of achievement and prosperity onto other countries. In fact, as these projects typically exist within a capitalist economic framework, they only benefit the small minority of Global South citizens who have access to capital, and who live in cities, a point which will be expanded on further. For most African and Latin American countries, however, the majority of the workers are agrarian and rural. 65% of Global South workers are rurally based compared to just 20% in the Global North, and 58% of the Global South labour force is engaged in agriculture.[45] Focussing on urban industrial projects to boost the productivity and competitiveness of these countries will only result in the subjection of rural areas to competition from urban areas, forcing peasants off the land and into the cities, where they will drive down wages and constitute a despondent urban proletariat. There is considerable historical precedent for such alienation: the 1848 revolutions were, in part, precipitated by the loss of guilds by agrarian workers who flooded into cities in France, Austria and Prussia, putting downward pressure on wages and fermenting revolt.[46]

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[44] https://newleftreview.org/issues/II112/articles/robert-pollin-de-growth-vs-a-green-new-deal

[45] *Lemuel Ekedegwa Odeh, A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF GLOBAL NORTH AND GLOBAL SOUTH ECONOMIES, Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa (Volume 12, No.3, 2010), Clarion University of Pennsylvania.*

[46] *A.J.P. Taylor, Europe: Grandeur and Decline, Penguin Books (1974)*

E.F. Schumacher recognised this divide, arguing that "*it is more important that everyone produces something than a few people should produce everything*".[47] He concluded that workplaces in the Global South needed to be small, cheap and utilise the labour and raw materials of the surroundings, thus mobilising the productive potential of the world's poorest nations and helping to prevent the exploitation of the rural poor by capitalist urban areas. Delineating that a balance had to be struck between technology that made workers obsolete and primitive equipment that obtained low levels of productivity, Schumacher recognised that 'intermediate technology' would provide the best solutions, by allowing workers to produce their own tools and allowing for both high productivity and high efficiency.[48]

The existence of market imperatives and compulsion to sell to the highest bidder means that the imposition of competitive, industrialised businesses in Global South countries often only benefits a small elite. For example, a Power Plant in Nairobi or another major city may automate large elements of its productive process to drive down costs, buy machinery and raw materials from Western countries, and sell products to Western consumers who can actually afford to buy them. This renders the labour-power and resources of the Global South nations completely unused (or exploited), ensuring the continued imperialist subjugation of Third World countries. Schumacher, citing an example of the economy of Puerto Rico (1952-62), in which factory-style manufacturing only increased employment by around 5,000 per year compared with the labour-intensive plans of China, India and Turkey which regularly saw major reductions in unemployment, demonstrated the viability of the proliferation of small-scale, agricultural labour.[49]

Setting the agricultural labourers to work would have a significantly positive impact in dealing with the climate crisis. Family farmers produce 80% of the world's food with just 24% of the world's farmland, and according to a 2011 UN report, could double world food production in just 10 years.[50] Furthermore, small farms can often be more productive than larger ones and are more self-sufficient, thus mitigating the need for carbon-intensive global trade. If the yields achieved by Kenya's small farms were matched by its large scale operations, their food production would double. If

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[47] *E.F. Schumacher, Small is Beautiful, Blond and Briggs (1973)*

[48] *ibid*

[49] *ibid*

[50] *http://www.srfood.org/images/stories/pdf/officialreports/20110308_a-hrc-16-49_agroecology_en.pdf*

this were the case in Russia, food production would be increased by a factor of six.[51] This shows why it is so important to resist the alienation of agricultural labourers by profit-driven, unscrupulous corporations which lease land to foreign investors and local elites, produce cash crops to feed urbanised populations and proliferate infrastructural projects that tear up the land to transport goods and people. For instance, in the last 50 years, 140 million hectares have been subjected to soya bean, oil palm, rapeseed and sugar production.[52] The specialisation and economies of scale imposed on agriculture have threatened ecological variety in all its forms.

New agricultural techniques to store carbon and increase the water-retention abilities of the soil could be developed by a return to small-scale agriculture, allowing economic downsizing to be coupled with environmental benefits. Approximately 24 Billion tons of fertile topsoil are lost every year as the soil gets thinner and is washed into lakes and rivers.[53] Moreover, increasing the symbiotic relationship between soil, plants and animals will allow the transfer of photosynthesis products back into the soil, creating a carbon sink. Crop rotation could prevent pests and weeds from interfering with yields, and afforestation could increase biodiversity and increase roots systems that grow deep into the soil, furthering S.O.C. storage.[54] This also provides an opportunity for job creation. Pollin's earlier contention that localisation and degrowth could leave poor people even poorer omits the potential benefits of a universal job guarantee based around small-scale agriculture. Such a proposal would, if combined with a productive and distributive system based around need and not profit, reduce the amount of carbon in the atmosphere while facilitating the creation of autonomous eco-communities.

Another false ecomodernist contention mentioned by Pollin is the perceived hostility towards "modernity" and technology amongst advocates of small-scale agriculture as a potential solution to the climate crisis. In fact, utilising existing advancements in technology to increase production and provide for the needs of people and to make the production process more efficient could constitute a major part of an eco-socialist future, provided that technology functioned in tandem with human labour, not in competition with it. Murray Bookchin stated that *"today the modern plant, with its clean,*

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[51] https://theecologist.org/2014/nov/22/want-double-world-food-production-return-land-small-farmers

[52] *ibid*

[53] *ibid*

[54] *Sarah E. Cornell, Understanding the Earth System, Cambridge University Press (2012)*

quiet, versatile, and largely automated facilities, contrasts deeply with the huge, ugly, congested factories inherited from an earlier era".[55] Bookchin also wrote that *"the smoky steel town...is an anachronism"* and that *"modern man can never return to the primitive life he so often idealises, but the point is that he doesn't have to".*[56] The merging of town and countryside through the application of small-scale, multipurpose technology that did not require vast amounts of imported raw materials or machinery, and did not have to meet the needs of a global market for mass-produced goods, would cut down on the environmental emissions and replacements costs necessitated by the modern capitalist system.[57]

While the implementation of sustainable farming methods and the mobilisation of all the economic resources of poorer countries might be a desirable means of countering the climate crisis, it is unachievable at present, as these countries remain saddled with debts incurred by the World Bank, the IMF, the EU and other multinational financial institutions. The systematic underdevelopment of the Global South has rendered their economies dependent on structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) and loans, meaning that not only do these countries export raw materials instead of finished goods, but they are often compelled to enact environmentally damaging policies in the interests of paying off their debts. SAPs, which began in the 1970s as a way for Global South countries to pay off debts incurred by high-risk loans by Western banks, often involved currency devaluation, spending cuts, encouragement of foreign investment and the liberalisation of trade. While intended to boost growth and alleviate poverty, SAPs often reduced Third World countries to debt colonies, such as in Mexico, where the percentage of GDP going to wages dropped from 40% in 1976 to 32% in 1982.[58]

Ghana is an example of where SAPs have had an adverse impact on environmental sustainability. Deforestation has increased by 55.9% since SAPs were first implemented there, and 19,400 hectares of land are cleared annually for cocoa production and timber extraction.[59] The rise in the value of arable land required to produce cocoa and timber forced rural populations off the land and into the cities,

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[55] *Murray Bookchin, Our Synthetic Environment, Knopf, New York (1962)*

[56] *ibid*

[57] *Bookchin, Anarchism*

[58] *Kefferstan, Sam, "The Perfect Storm: Lasting Impacts of Structural Adjustment Programs and Pressures of Climate Change in Latin America and Ghana, Africa" (2017) Student Showcase.20.*

[59] *ibid*

demonstrating again that urbanisation and the industrialisation of agriculture are symbiotically connected, and environmentally destructive. These neocolonial economic formulations imposed upon countries across Africa and Latin America preclude them from developing export markets and sustainable programs of their own. In fact, a clear parallel exists between pre-independence Ghana and post-independence Ghana. Kwame Nkrumah commented on the economic modalities of pre-independence Ghana, stating, *"While we produce the raw materials for the manufacture of soap and edible fats, palm products, the manufacture of these items was discouraged. A British firm owning lime plantations here...actively expresses the juice from the fruit before shipping it in bulk to the United Kingdom and exporting it back to us, bottled, to retail in stores at a high price".*[60] In this respect, the dynamics of exploitation seemed to have changed little. The only thing that has changed is the perpetrator, in that it is no longer a nation-state that is responsible for this deliberate economic underdevelopment, but international financial institutions. The maintenance of an unequal balance of trade and the imposition of capitalist modes of production on poorer countries remains a central tenet of modern imperialism.

Herman Daly, proposing 10 policies for a zero-growth, steady-state economy in which human wellbeing and technological advancement are prioritised in an economy that does not physically expand, argued for the downgrading of the World Bank, IMF and WTO. He stated that countries being tied to the US dollar furthered American exploitation and that requiring the United States to pay a penalty for its deficit with the rest of the world (and China to pay a penalty for its surplus) would disincentivise economically imperialist policies.[61] Rolling back the influence of the World Bank and IMF and writing off Third World debt would provide an opportunity for democratic confederalist institutions to take control of production and distribution, and for those countries to reestablish sovereign control over their own economies. In 1989, the Dutch government wrote off $33m worth of Costa Rica's debt in exchange for $10m worth of local investment in sustainable soils, and a UN Development Programme of the same year estimated that poorer countries spent $146b on military spending, which could free up $50b annually for environmental development.[62]

The localisation and downscaling of the economy that is required to meet sustainable levels and to roll back the catastrophic environmental damage done by endless growth

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[60] *Peter Fryer, Black People in the British Empire, Pluto Press (1989)*

[61] *https://steadystate.org/top-10-policies-for-a-steady-state-economy/*

[62] *Lester R. Brown, Saving the Planet, Earthscan Publications (1992)*

and productivism will have to be accompanied by a new conception of politics and the meaning of political involvement. Murray Bookchin advocated a return to the conception of the *polis* that existed in Ancient Greece, that is to say, a system in which citizens managed democratic decisions in a face-to-face manner, orienting the direction of politics in a communitarian and inclusive direction away from a centralised, bureaucratic state apparatus.[63] In so doing, Bookchin understood that it is only through bottom-up political action, in which the majority of people can participate not only in the production process but in the political and social spheres, that genuine environmentalist reforms can be enacted, because when social democratic parties attempt to control and leverage the State apparatus to achieve environmentalist aims, they typically have to make concessions that render any progress void. An example would be the European Green Party who, in 2009, collaborated with the Club of Rome to host a conference on sustainable degrowth, but whose publications and journals have gradually omitted any mention of degrowth as they have come closer to achieving power.[64]

In sum, the contentions made by ecomodernists that degrowth will cause the living standards of the poorest people on Earth to decline do not account for either the potential of small-scale agriculture or the ability of miniaturised technology to work in tandem with human labour to achieve material abundance. The development of the productive forces has allowed us to produce far more food than we need, but the profit motive prevents it from being equitably distributed. A return to small-scale agriculture, involving self-sufficient communities using land, forestry and soil cultivation to sequester carbon without requiring high-throughput technology or carbon-intensive trade would be far more beneficial to the environment than the ecomodernist alternative. Moreover, post-growth politics and the enactment of the aforementioned ideas will involve rolling back the influence of the imperialist World Bank and IMF, institutions which systematically prevent the Global South from engaging in environmentalist politics.

CONCLUSION

In an era of ecological collapse, as we contemplate how to respond to the buildup of greenhouse gas emissions, the acidification of the oceans and the possibility of parts of the Earth becoming inhospitable, Murray Bookchin's thought shows an ever-growing endurance. His analysis of the hierarchical relationship between man and

[63] https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/murray-bookchin-libertarian-municipalism-an-overview

[64] https://www.degrowth.info/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/3413.pdf

nature, of the exploitation inherent within the private capture of land, and of the bureaucratic, centralised State mechanisms which commodify and denude the environment makes it possible to understand how the functioning and circulation of Capital depletes and denudes our planet's finite resources. The humanism of Bookchin's thought entails a wider reconceptualising of all hierarchies of power, extolling the benefits of decentralisation in the economy, and direct democracy in the political sphere so that people have ownership and control over the productive process.

The necessity for the economy to grow at 3% per year or collapse, and the accumulation and competition that inevitably results from the profit motive, has meant that the environment is subjected to an economic calculus which discards its objective value. Driven by a myriad of factors including rampant consumerism and cultural expectations associating material abundance with happiness, growth has proven incompatible with the continued existence of life on Earth. Meanwhile, the "environmentalist" dissenters who are given media and broadcasting platforms tend to espouse ideas that "decouple" growth from environmental impact, seemingly oblivious to the fact that they too are trapped in a capitalistic paradigm of viewing growth and productivity as desirable for their own sake. In reality, the high-throughput and capital-intensive nature of "green technology", in addition to the increased consumption which results from its implementation, makes "absolute decoupling" impossible and ecomodernism untenable, even in a best-case scenario.

Few viable solutions exist outside of the calculus of profit and loss. The reconnection of humanity with nature in an economic system based on mutual aid and small-scale farming would dismantle these hierarchies and provide a way of avoiding incurring additional environmental damage by utilising existing methods to sequester carbon in the soil. This bottom-up approach to environmentalism, combined with a top-down restructuring of the World Bank, IMF, EU and WTO, could be the only way of alleviating the perilous condition of our planet. The action that must be taken is all-encompassing and daunting; the uprooting of our entire economic system is an unfathomable task and it may seem easier to argue that the 'Green New Deal' will solve the climate crisis. But Murray Bookchin stated that *"If we do not do the impossible, we shall be faced with the unthinkable"*, and the unthinkable might be upon us far sooner than we imagine.[65]

[65] Bookchin, *Freedom*.

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