

Post-Growth Economics, Sustainability and Equality: Towards a Green Republican Political Economy

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Extremely rough draft! Please read but don't quote from it....please!

Abstract

An important part of repoliticising the economy and re-regulating the market mode of its organisation is the 'letting go' of the imperative for economic growth. Given that one of the main reasons given for a self-regulating capitalist market organisation of the economy is its superiority in achieving high rates of productivity and growth, then it follows that a de-prioritisation of these objectives for productivity and growth/accumulation undermines or reduces arguments for a self-regulating and capitalist organisation of the economy. Whether this would gain widespread political and democratic support is of course another issue entirely, but a post or low growth economic objective can move us towards a republican mode of political economy. This paper offers a republican approach to developing a green republican post-growth political economy. Part of this republican approach is to sketch some of the historical origins of economic growth and its roots in colonialism, exploitation and dispossession. It then moves on to consider some of the important lacunas and omissions from GDP, practices and forms of non-monetised activities which are important from a republican perspective. As such, orthodox neoclassical analytical conceptualisations of 'the economy' are both partial and socially and ecologically dangerous. The paper then proceeds to offer ways in which a green republican political economy can critique dominant views of consumption qua consumerism and production qua productivism, both in the service of GDP growth. Green republicanism can offer transformed accounts and practices of consumption and production. These transformative, reconstructive proposals revolve respectively around rescuing consumption from consumerism (central to which is drawing attention to the liberty corroding effects of advertising and the promotion of 'alternative hedonism'). In relation to the sphere of production, a green republicanism should focus on democratising production to enable some of the internal goods of labour to be realised in a post-growth context, reducing the working week and more fully appreciating that a sustainable post-growth economy requires moving beyond a narrow focus on employment towards an enlarged conception of the economy in which 'work' and the 'core economy' is more prominent.

History, economic growth and domination

Colonialism, imperialism and the modern variants are part of the ‘hidden’ history of modern economic growth, one whereby a minority of the human population in the ‘west’ or ‘north’ achieved high levels of energy use (from fossil fuels), economic growth (industrialism, consumerism) from the systemic exploitation and domination of the peoples, resources and places of other parts of the world.

Whether expressed in terms of classical accounts of capitalist imperialism (Lenin, Luxemburg), ‘centre-periphery’ relations (Wallerstein), ‘environmental injustice’ (Martinez-Alier), ‘accumulation by dispossession’ (Harvey, 2004), or more recent notions of colonial ‘cheap nature’, the economic growth achieved by a minority of the globe’s population has been, in part, on the back of exploitation, dispossession and injustice. As Jason Moore notes

“Longstanding patterns of state and imperial governance of nature have produced a set of conditions of production which I call Cheap Nature. The Four Cheaps – labour power, food, energy and raw materials – are necessary to launch and sustain great bursts of capital accumulation”. (2017: 177)

Industrialism and imperialism go hand in hand, thus troubling the dominant comforting narrative in the minority world of its exceptionalism being based on technological ingenuity, scientific freedom and enlightenment cultural norms. While these were important

Indeed, one can go back further in time to see how closely domination, dispossession and war are at the heart of what we now call ‘economic growth’ and the modern ‘economy’. In many respects, and here perhaps exaggerating for effect (but not exaggerating completely), just as Marx said capitalism comes in the world dripping from every pore with blood, the same can (unsurprisingly) be said of economic growth.

Here, I wish to pause and illustrate this historical connection between domination, dispossession and violence (which I take to be antithetical to modern republic notions of freedom, the common good and statecraft, notwithstanding the historical connection between certain strands of republic thinking and militarism and colonial expansion (Barry, 2012) and a) ideas of economic development, growth and measurements of the health or success of the human economy, and b) how the evolution of these ideas usually lose connection with their historical origins and often are presented as ‘commonsense’ and ‘taken for granted’.

This story of growth and colonialism begins in Ireland in the 17th century and with a man named Sir William Petty. Many scholars have suggested that this period and the colonisation, military occupation and the plantation of the island of Ireland by English forces marks the birth of modern economics, the

emergence of economic management as an important element of statecraft (especially in the context of rival nascent nation-states in Europe) and ideas of economic measurement, rational administration and calculation (Lepenies, 2016; Fox, 2009)

As Charles Tilly has pointed out, wars made states and states made wars, and an important part of the war capabilities of early (and current) nation-states is their management of growing economies, based on trade, innovation and ownership of capital and knowledge etc. (Tilly, 1990). The ‘taxation/warfare’ nexus Tilly explores is explicitly based on the necessity for a state to preside over a growing economy, thus increasing its tax base the use of which could pay and resource a professional standing army and/or pay for mercenaries for use in external wars with rival nation-states or suppressing internal opponents of the state.¹

After the crushing of the Irish rebellion (1641-1651) English Cromwellian forces needed an accurate map of landownership and value etc. to divide the spoils. In the wake of the Cromwellian confiscations of land, Petty coordinated the evaluation and mapping of over 8 million Irish acres, as recorded in his *Down Survey of 1656* (Fox, 2009). And to state the obvious, these first measurements of Irish land and its economy were motivated by colonial and expropriation and exploitative rather than humanitarian interests, that is for the interests of the British crown and its ruling elite, not the local Irish peasants and their elites. As Lepenies points out:

“Thanks to his organizational skills and his specialist knowledge, Petty very quickly conducted this mapping process, thereby making a name for himself in England's political circles. With the help of his map, land and estates were divided up and the local population was driven out. ...As an ennobled member of Parliament, he vehemently defended the interest of the English settlers in Ireland” (Lepenies, 2016 :11).

He attempted to measure economic productivity in Ireland via a focus on land and labour, suggesting Ireland was under-populated as well as under-productive and therefore in need of more people and imported technology, innovation and modes of efficient economic/agricultural management.²

His calculations of national income, measurements of population dynamics of births and deaths for example, were explicitly aimed to measure Britain against its two main rivals - Holland and France- as well as determine the war fighting capacity of Britain (something of course which was central to the more

¹ One could also make a case for the invention of money, as debt, as being based on war and the need to fund armies, which goes much further back in time to 600-500 BC (Graeber, 2011).

² Tellingly, when calculating the ‘value added’ of Irish people/peasants to the land “he seems to have taken as his equivalent figure for Ireland in 1672 that usually used for slaves” (Fox, 2009: 394), giving us an insight to his English colonial view of the indigenous Irish.

recent calculations of GDP in the build up to the second world war in the USA and the UK).

As Fox in his study of the importance of Petty's experiences in Ireland to the development of his ideas of economics notes,

“He imbibed from his mentor, Thomas Hobbes, the philosophy that the ends of government are to secure the ‘peace and plenty’ of the state and he saw the role of what he called *‘political oeconomies’* as demonstrating how these goals might best be achieved” (Fox, 2009: 389).

And colonisation and dispassion of land and resources, the compelling of peoples into the ‘modern economy’ were justified and necessary state-backed political economy strategies to achieve this ‘peace and plenty’, both achieved by war and organised violence (and the credible threat of state violence).

Petty proposed that the most effective way to ‘improve Ireland’ economically and also make it less ‘rebellious’ was the transplanting of Irish people in England and English settlers in Ireland. “He was not the first Englishman to think that the best way to improve the Irish was to make them more like the English, and he would not be the last, but his was at least a perspective *underpinned by a reasoned theory of economic growth*” (Fox, 2009: 397; emphasis added). And he also shared the colonial-Eurocentric belief that part of the process for improving uncultivated lands and non- or ‘under-civilised’ peoples, such as the Irish, was to change indigenous attitudes and cultural norms so that the local population were motivated towards meeting wants (via market exchange, trade and economic growth) as opposed to satisfying needs (via self-sufficiency without market exchange). Here we both leave this short vignette on the ‘pre-history of economic growth’ and also note how the attitudes and views of colonial administrators such as Petty towards native, colonised peoples, ideas of ‘progress’, ‘improvement’ and what we would now call ‘modernisation’, while specific to Ireland in the 17th century are not just similar but almost identical to more recent Eurocentric-colonial attitudes and practices toward the global South and discourses and strategies around identifying the ‘developed’ and ‘undeveloped’ (Escobar, 1995).³ And above all, that the achievement of the ‘self-evident’ societal good of ‘economic growth’ can require and compensate for major and sometimes traumatic and violent changes in a society’s structure, culture and norms (this is similar to the argument made below about the ‘wage compensation’ posited for the disutility of employment). Like the ancient Greek myth of Achilles’ Lance, economic growth, like later imperialist and racist discourses of the ‘white man’s burden’ with which economic growth is connected historically, were understood and

³ While contested and contestable, there is merit in viewing the colonisation of Ireland as the first systematic imperial colonisation by a modern nation-state, and thus there may be much to learn from that experience and later examples of colonisation and decolonisation, development/undevelopment, modernity and modernisation.

justified by those who promoted them, as having the capacity to (eventually and perhaps unevenly) heal the wounds they inflicted (Barry, 2016).

Needless to say both from a methodological point of view (in appreciating the importance of history) and substantively (in relation to freedom and domination), the colonial and liberty-denying origins of economic growth (and associated terms such as modernisation, civilisation, development) are important in informing and contextualising a republican and green republican analysis and politics. Part of this relates to whether the liberty denying, exploitative, unjust and unequal consumption of the earth's resources and production of pollution, which created the conditions for modern economic growth is biophysically possible to be extended to the world as a whole. And beyond the biophysical aspects, if it took so much exploitation, violence, dispossession and unfreedom (and continued neo-colonial and unjust global political economy structures) to enable a minority of the world's population to attain high levels of consumer lifestyles, is it normatively desirable or possible to attain the same ends for humanity as a whole? And are those economic ends themselves desirable? Or desirable beyond a threshold? These are some of the concerns of a historically located and informed green republican political economy.

GDP measured Growth and the Economic Common Good

Since GDP measured economic growth does not include non-market exchanged goods, services and economic activities (this is the 'core economy' discussed later, and which has historically made up most human economic activity, and disproportionately still do for the poor and marginalised and in the global south), it offers an impoverished conceptualisations of the economic common good, something that is obviously of concern from a green republican point of view. I include below one of the most eloquent and elegant criticisms of the limits and dangers of equating economic growth and social progress, from Senator Robert Kennedy in a speech he gave at the University of Kansas in March 1968 (a couple of weeks before he was assassinated):

Too much and for too long, we seemed to have surrendered personal excellence and community values in the mere accumulation of material things. Our Gross National Product, now, is over \$800 billion dollars a year, but that Gross National Product - if we judge the United States of America by that - that Gross National Product counts air pollution and cigarette advertising, and ambulances to clear our highways of carnage. It counts special locks for our doors and the jails for the people who break them. It counts the destruction of the redwood and the loss of our natural wonder in chaotic sprawl. It counts napalm and counts nuclear warheads and armored cars for the police to fight the riots in our cities. It counts Whitman's rifle and Speck's knife, and the television programs which glorify violence in order to sell toys to our children. Yet the gross national product does not allow for the health

of our children, the quality of their education or the joy of their play. It does not include the beauty of our poetry or the strength of our marriages, the intelligence of our public debate or the integrity of our public officials. It measures neither our wit nor our courage, neither our wisdom nor our learning, neither our compassion nor our devotion to our country, it measures everything in short, except that which makes life worthwhile. And it can tell us everything about America except why we are proud that we are Americans. (Kennedy, 1968).

A focus on economic growth when equated with social progress and human improvement arbitrarily circumscribes the official conceptualisation of the economic common good. Thus state's role in devising policies and regulations to promote that good is more limited than it otherwise might be if there was an expanded conceptualisation and measure of the economic common good.

Thus social solidarity, informal economic exchange, the gendered work of women in the home, volunteering, citizenship barter etc. are all excluded from GDP. Likewise GDP does not consider threats to the common good in terms of pollution and resources depletion. As Fiorimonti notes "Through GDP, our model of growth becomes a sum of market consumption, regardless of whether what is consumed is good for society, for the environment, and as a consequence, for the economy itself" (Fiorimonti, 2017: 97). The inexorable logic of GDP, in solely focusing on monetised economic production and consumption dovetails with the neoliberal logic of privatisation, taking products and services that were once outside the market and commodifying them. When you marry your gardener, GDP falls after all, or while a community garden that feeds people does not count in GDP, turning that volunteer economic productive activity into a business does.

By disregarding the ecological costs of economic activity such as pollution and the negative health impacts associated with it, or the depletion of natural resources, or the social costs in terms of mental distress due to new flexible, productivity modes of labour, GDP gives both a skewed and a risky perception of the economy. Skewed in that it is a measure that favours commercial and corporate interests in that the externalities from their activities are not included in GDP. An example of how moving beyond GDP would threaten these corporate interests is the way the coal industry in the USA mobilised to reject and defeat an initiative under President Clinton to include the depletion of coal reserves and the negative effects of air pollution as a cost to GDP since if this happened it would show that the coal industry does not contribute anything positive to the country (Cobb et al, 1995: 6).

Conversely, moving beyond GDP economic growth and towards a focus on and measurements of human flourishing or wellbeing would enable the true social value of community, civic society and voluntary citizen activity. From a green republican perspective, one that is, seeks to promote active citizenship and a democratic society (as opposed to simply a democratic system) publicly

recognising the value of citizenship ‘the political labour of the maintenance and upkeep of our democracy’ would not only be an obviously positive development, but also serve to encourage and promote in the ‘good of politics’ in the public imagination. A more expanded republican conceptualisation of social progress such as being roughly outlined here could have led, for example, to then then Present of America, George Bush Jr, who urged US citizens in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks to go shopping. In this citizens were explicitly reduced to consumers, whereas a republic responses might have been for him to order free copies of the US Constitution to be distributed throughout the republic and call on citizens to read, reflect and gather to discuss their republican democracy and citizen rights in open, public and collective political defiance of terrorism.

Another issue that economic growth as measured by GDP does not consider, and which explains its success in depoliticising economic decisions in avoiding the question of distribution is socio-economic inequality. And given inequality can have negative effects both on social cohesion, the common good and practices of citizenship, all issues of concern to republicans, it is to inequality and growth we turn to next.

Inequality

Put simply, growth is a substitute for equality and it removes issues of social injustice and distribution from public debate and policy making around the economy. Extreme inequality undermines republican political values of political equality and freedom as non-domination. But even from a non-republican perspective it can be criticised. From a liberal perspective, the rise in inequality in wealth, assets and income over the past 3 decades under neoliberalism has undermined the principle of ‘equality of opportunity’. As U.S. Federal Reserve Chair Janet Yellen noted at a Fed conference in Boston in the fall of 2014.

“The extent of and continuing increase in inequality in the United States greatly concern me. I think it is appropriate to ask whether this trend is compatible with values rooted in our nation’s history, among them the high value Americans have traditionally placed on equality of opportunity.”

Another reason is how too much inequality destabilises a capitalist economy, threatening and producing recessions (Kumhoff and Rancière, 2010). I say this since while republicans (and green republicans) have principled reasons to wish to decrease inequality, the pragmatism which I take to be a particular hallmark of the republican political tradition, also means they are attentive to functional, system maintaining issues in relation to a working as well as a normatively workable human economy.

It is important here to stress that what is at stake is the degree and types of inequalities that undermines or offends republican sensitivities. That is,

there are permission degrees and forms of inequality and that what an economy and society organised according to republican principles seeks to achieve for its members is ‘rough equality’ not strict egalitarianism. Not all inequalities damage serious and fundamental human interests or profoundly and negatively impact the status (or our self-understanding) of ourselves as worthy, free and equal etc.. And it is how inequalities in life experiences or social, economic and cultural conditions degrade both the status and practices of equal citizenship (as well as what I would call the ‘negative Aristotelian’ dimensions of human flourishing (Barry, 2012:)), and undermine other important intrinsic and instrumental republican goods such as social solidarity.

Here the issue of thresholds and identifying points beyond which something or some dynamic has tipped over into become either functionally negative and/or normatively objectionable is important...if conceptually difficult to sustain against those who demand who sets this threshold, what precisely it measures and how do we (whoever this we is) know it has passed the critical threshold. Here I would agree with Schuppert that the standard republican account of freedom as non-domination and the intentional manipulation of the will of another is necessary but insufficient to integrate social equality within republican thinking and ideas of freedom as non-alienation are also needed to reduce other forms of human vulnerability and negative social/interpersonal relations and self-regarding concerns around self-respect and self-worth (Schuppert, 2014: 4).

Consumerism

Other forms of vulnerability that need to be guarded against include structural (which can be political economic as well as cultural) forms of vulnerability production such as limitless economic production and growth based on fossil fuels and motivated by and resulting in mass over consumption. Here, conjoining green political economy post-growth analysis and republican ideas, I suggest that modern mass consumerism on the one hand (Xavier, 2016) and widespread non-democratised workplaces on the other (discussed below) are key structural or institutionalised features of modern carbon consumer capitalism which undermine not only their own ecological and social conditions, but are also liberty compromising and vulnerability producing.

Status competition is a key element of consumerism and is based on manipulating forms of a person’s vulnerability and points to the social standing and social relations that matter to people, their sense of themselves and self-worth, beyond material meeting of needs (think of the ‘shame’ of a labourer not having a linen shirt as Adam Smith noted in his *Wealth of*

Nations).⁴ Poverty is not merely about physical deprivation after all. How should republicans respond and tackle such structural drivers of unfreedom and manipulation? Or extending this further to the dominant teaching of economics which entails first the explicit depoliticisation of neoclassical economics as a necessary precondition for the normalisation of capitalism in our schools and universities such that it seeps out as a ‘dominant commonsense’ which results in it being easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism? Here, again echoing Schuppert, we can make the obvious point that if some forms of thinking and ideas about the economy have achieved almost ‘full spectrum ideological domination’ (Barry, 2017) – never mind the equally pervasive and corrosive effect of the ‘colonisation of our psyches’ by consumer capitalism (REF), then republicans and especially green republicans need to extend the Pettit-derived notion of freedom as non-domination to this structural arena. Just as pollution can be diffuse, hence the need for non-point source pollution regulation, ideological domination can also be diffuse as can other sources of social harm, disadvantage and human vulnerability.

Whether expressed in the idiom of ‘the third face of power’ (Lukes, 1974) or more republican conceptualisations of domination, a strong green republican argument can be advanced that marketing, advertising and the active shaping of preferences and desires by private economic actors can, *certeteris paribus*, be viewed as a form of arbitrary domination, compromising of autonomy and freedom and constitutive of certain types of human harms.⁵ The marketing and advertising industry is massive, an industry worth approximately \$550 billion in 2017⁶ (compare that to the UN calculation that eliminating world hunger would cost \$267 billion p.a). It is no surprise that its modern origins can be traced to the post WWII period in core liberal democratic capitalist

⁴ ‘A linen shirt, for example, is, strictly speaking, not a necessary of life. The Greeks and Romans lived, I suppose, very comfortably, though they had no linen. But in the present times, through the greater part of Europe, a creditable day-labourer would be ashamed to appear in public without a linen shirt, the want of which would be supposed to denote that disgraceful degree of poverty, which, it is presumed, nobody can well fall into without extreme bad conduct.’ (Smith, *WoN*).

⁵ There is another argument that republicans can use to question and be concerned about consumerism, this is the old republican suspicion of the deleterious political, military and ethical effects of luxury. Classical republican concerns about luxury range from the sexist – that luxuries and a concern with their pursuit and possession would result in an ‘effeminate’ male population compromising the ability of the republic to defend itself in war, to concerns about a how a society oriented towards the production and consumption of luxuries would be a class ridden and internally unstable social and political order.

⁶ “North America is the region that invests most in the sector, followed by Asia and Western Europe. Middle East and Africa as well as Central and Eastern Europe spend least. The largest ad market in the world, the United States expended more than 190 billion U.S. dollars on advertising in 2016, while China, second in the ranking, invested less than half of the amount in the same period. American consumer goods corporation Procter & Gamble was the largest advertiser worldwide, having spent more than 10 billion U.S. dollars on ads. Other big advertisers include Dutch-British Unilever, French L’Oréal, and German Volkswagen, respectively second, third and fourth in the ranking” (from <https://www.statista.com/topics/990/global-advertising-market/> (accessed 2/4/18).

societies in North America and Europe connected to the modern birth of GDP growth as a ‘core state imperative’ (Barry, 2018). For reasons of space I here state without argument that GDP growth under capitalism (‘undifferentiated economic growth as a permanent feature of the economy’) is ecologically unsustainable, thus meaning this is a reason for green republicanism to see it as a problem and seek to transform and transcend it (or more importantly disaggregate it by economic sphere and geographical scales, i.e. while sympathetic to degrowth and post-growth positions, I am not proposing here a simple ‘anti-growth’ perspective). I am more interested here in the non-ecological, social and political harms that can result from consumerism in general and advertising and marketing in particular.

Advertising was a structural requirement of capitalist economic growth to ensure there was always sufficient and growing demand to absorb productive expansion. As one marketing head put it in the 1950s, “I see advertising as an educational and activating force capable of producing the changes in demand which we need. By educating people into higher living standards, it ensures that consumption will rise to a level justified by our production” (in Gorz, 1989: 20). Perhaps the most well know and honest reasoning behind advertising is the following

Our enormously productive economy demands that we make consumption our way of life, that we convert buying and use of goods into rituals, that we seek our spiritual satisfactions, our ego satisfactions, in consumption... *We need things consumed, burned up, worn out, replaced, and discarded at an ever increasing pace.* (in Williams, 2010: 129).

The waste which is the inevitable outcome of this excitation of superfluous wants, the efficient creation and marshalling of human desires in the service of a growing consumer economy is of obvious ecological concern. But also the opportunity costs in terms of the other uses and products and services those resources, technology, human labour and creativity could have produced. While a hugely complicated and contested issue, part of the issue here is who owns and controls the productive means of a society (the ‘means of production’ in Marx’s sense), which is but another way of saying that those who have an interest in advertising are, from a green republican political economy point of view, aligned with the interests not of the consumers (to whom they are ostensibly providing a service) nor of the workers who will produce those commodities and services they advertise. While as a side effect employment will be created and novelty available for consumers, the main beneficiaries are owners of the means of production.⁷

⁷ It is telling that the originator of the measure of economic growth, GDP, Simon Kuznets explicitly sought to exclude advertising from GDP on the grounds that like financial and speculative activities are “properly speaking, costs implicit in our economic civilisation” (in Mitra-Khan, 2011: 239-40)

What sorts of state action in terms of specific policies and regulations or citizenship/civil society responses might be possible or required to address some of the negative liberty and autonomy impairing effects of advertising and consumerism? The infantilisation of adults is one issue to consider – but is there a danger of ‘forcing citizens to be adults’ in contemplating regulations over or against infantilising producing forms of advertising? Is there anything necessary wrong or bad in adults temporarily being treated like and responding like children? Just as a green republican position is not ‘anti-growth’ but a more nuanced approach to asking questions around ‘growth of what?’, ‘for what purposes?’ ‘in what areas?’ ‘for how long’ etc. it is also not ‘anti-consumption’ per se, but ‘anti-consumerism’.

Alternative Hedonism and an Economy of Sustainable Desire

One solution to the problem of consumerism is the promotion of what has been termed ‘alternative hedonism’, less ecologically and socially harmful ways of expanding and fulfilling human desires and pleasure. Indeed some such as Kate Soper hold that there are republican possibilities within such transformed consumption as hybridised sites of ‘consumer-citizen’ activism (Soper, 2007), not least in relation to ethical consumption and acknowledged forms of unsustainable and therefore problematic consumption. Thus it is possible for sites and practices of consumption (if not consumerism itself) to neither be necessarily pitted against citizenship or citizen identity nor ecologically negative.

Alternative hedonism as defined by Soper refers to

‘changing consumption practice that derive from the more negative aspects for consumers themselves of their high-speed, work-dominated, materialistic lifestyle, and are fed by a sense that important pleasures and sources of gratification are being lost or unrealized as a consequence of it’ (Soper, 2007: 211).

Thus, alternative hedonism’ points to reconceptualisations of the good life and alternative notions of human flourishing which are more compatible to green republican ideals. However, for my purposes here, the transcending of the ‘consumer-citizen’ dichotomy (and therefore the possible inclusion of consumer practices and modes of consumption within green republican politics and forms of citizenship) allows for a link between current conceptions of the good life (based around consumption/consumerism) and future sustainable ones. In short, alternative hedonism allows for the transformation of excessive consumption qua consumerism into moderate or mindful forms of consumption, and for alternative or complementary forms of pleasure for example to be pursued as substitutes for more straightforwardly ecologically unsustainable and/or social unjust. Alternative hedonism thus allows for a ‘preservative transcendence’ of consumption, abandoning its negative and vulnerability creating side effects, without completely

abandoning it, viewing it as intrinsically morally suspect, or depolitical and depoliticising.

This is important not least strategically for generating popular support for alternative, less unsustainable political economies and new forms of production and consumption. Given the resistance that will result from any transition to a green, low carbon political economy, which is framed or understood as people experiencing sacrifice, new forms of scarcity or having opportunities and experiences removed from them, it is vital that the transition from 'here' to 'there' is one characterised by desire, pleasure and expanding human opportunities. As George Monbiot rightly put it, 'our problem is that no one ever rioted for austerity. People take to the streets because they want to consume more, not less' (Monbiot, 2003). Rather, in shaping a vision for post-growth sustainable economies we need to heed to Rob Hopkins, founder of the Transition Towns movement who wisely noted that any 'vision for a green future should be like receiving a postcard from a desirable holiday destination' i.e. something that is desired as a better socio-economic rather than something grudgingly accepted or accepted/imposed for survival /emergency reasons.⁸

Democratising the workplace or 'Work as if you live in the early days of a better nation' (Alasdair Gray)

Shifting from consumption to production we can consider some green republican political economy perspectives on the sphere of work or employment. For reasons that will be clearer below, I wish to distinguish employment from work. I view employment as a sub-set of human productive labour or work, a key characteristic of which is that it is remunerated i.e. it's a form of wage labour.

How can a democratic society (here explicitly focusing on Tocqueville's famous republican notion of distinguishing a 'democratic system' from a 'democratic society' (reference) be said to exist when the vast experience of the overwhelming number of its citizens is 'wage slavery'? Consistent with green political arguments for greater democratisation of economic and political life (including decentralisation), the green republican asks 'why should democracy end at the factory/office/classroom door?' And to cut a long story short, it seems the dominant and at first glance not unreasonable justifications for answering in the negative revolve around the necessity of non-democratic norms to production on grounds of efficiency to maximise output and increase worker productivity, an instrumental view of employment in part based on the conceptualisation of employment as 'disutility' (most commonly found in neoclassical economics).⁹ One of the main green

⁸ Or as Buckminster Fuller noted, "You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete."

⁹ A fuller account of this perverse idea of 'work as disutility' would require excavating the distinctly religious/Christian roots of this idea. In the Christian legacy painful work is God's

republican reasons for democratising employment is the realisation some of the *internal goods of employment*, such as autonomy, authenticity, creativity, cooperation, and self-realisation, all discounted in most mainstream political economic models and thinking, thus challenging neoclassical/orthodox views of employment as ‘disutility’ –that is, primarily only engaged in to secure wages.¹⁰

But here we need fundamentally challenge the dominant neoclassical claim that employment is something that is intrinsically something bad, negative or a disutility? What are the origins of this claim/assumption (or more correctly ‘axiom’ in orthodox economics – a value judgements ‘smuggled in’ and present/perceived as a ‘fact’ (Barry, 2018))? A main source are the classical liberal economists such as Adam Smith who defined work as ‘toil and trouble’ (Smith 1976: 47), or early utilitarian philosophers such as Jeremy Bentham: ‘Insofar as labour is taken in its proper sense, love of labour is a contradiction in terms’. (1983: 104), and even a liberal proto-green such as John Stuart Mill opined that, ‘Work, I imagine, is not a good in itself. There is nothing laudable in work for work’s sake’ (Mill, 1984: 90).

“The theory of compensating wage differentials, for example, recognises that workers value different types of work and that their preferences for work affect their wage demands. Workers who prefer intrinsically rewarding work, for instance, are assumed to forgo higher wages to achieve their preferences. The problem with this approach is that in practice workers cannot always be guaranteed to realise their preferences: low pay, for example, is very often associated with dull and uninteresting work, contradicting the outcomes predicted by the theory of compensating wage differentials”. (Spencer, 2014: 282-3)

However key here to understanding the decisions of workers and a more rounded account of production itself are issues of power, property rights, ownership and control, as well as the management systems of governance that structure and organise conditions and internal processes of employment and production as well as monetary compensation. That is, to understand the who, what, where and how of both the ‘wage’ and the ‘slavery’ components of ‘wage slavery’.

Conceptualising work as ‘disutility’ also forms basis of another problematic assumption (found in both neoclassical economics and ‘commonsense’ views

punishment for Adam and Eve disobeying God’s command and eating from the tree of knowledge: “for the woman, pain in childbirth and subordination to man, and, for the man, relegation to an accursed ground with which he must toil and sweat for his subsistence.” Hence the long history of work as ‘Adam’s curse’, the sundering of pleasure and human labour.

¹⁰ There are also some external reasons that green civic republicans might also defend the democratic regulation of economic activity/market actors and exchange, and justify state regulation as a non-dominating interference for the achievement of, inter alia, the conditions for collective freedom, equality and/or ecological sustainability and the protection of other common goods.

of the economy and the sphere of work and production). This is the pervasive view (primarily from a 'management' perspective but also found beyond this) of workers as actual or always potential 'shirkers', and the justification of the types of intrusive surveillance outlined in the next section. If work is a disutility, painful, toilsome and so on, it is rational and 'natural' to assume they will seek to avoid it – so from Marx's 'wage slaves' we come to 'work-shy idlers', and a corresponding need to put in place employment-based processes to monitor and limit this.

Wage-Slavery and Productive Unfreedom

Non- or anti-democratic forms of management and governance, such as we find in most, if not all, forms of modern employment are, from a republican point of view, forms of domination and alienation – 'despotic experiences of non-autonomy' on a daily and mass basis. As Emma Goldman famously noted in comparing slavery and employment under capitalism: 'The only difference is that you are hired slaves instead of block slaves'. Or consider Engels' argument that:

The slave is sold once and for all; the proletarian must sell himself daily and hourly. The individual slave, property of one master, is assured an existence, however miserable it may be, because of the master's interest. The individual proletarian, property as it were of the entire bourgeois class which buys his labour only when someone has need of it, has no secure existence. (Engels, 1847)

I here leave to one side the issue of how workers can be said to 'voluntarily' submit themselves to such forms of 'despotic power', and associated ideas of contractual relations between employees and employers. Suffice to say that I question how 'voluntary' and 'free' individuals are in making these decisions, given the lack of viable alternatives for those without assets or non-wage slavery sources of income and/or meeting their needs. I also note in passing that neoclassical economics assumes that individuals 'choose' whether to work or not, going so far as to view unemployment as 'voluntary leisure' (Spencer, 2006: 459).¹¹

Notwithstanding the limits of the paradigmatic republican case of unfreedom in the 'master-slave' relation (as outlined by Schuppert above), let us take modern employment as a form of wage slavery, and therefore why green republicans should be concerned about it, and supportive of attempts to reduce it not overcome the undemocratic unfreedoms of this condition. Take some examples from the USA to illustrate modern conditions of wage slavery

¹¹ Hence the potential of what could be viewed as quintessentially green republican policy such as a universal basic income to remove or at least reduce the fear of lack of income/poverty, hopelessness or uselessness which is the alternative to taking formally paid employment.

and despotic rule in the sphere of employment and production (an outlier case granted but pioneer of innovations in production, including the control of workers, which other countries follow):

Consider some facts about how American employers control their workers. Amazon prohibits employees from exchanging casual remarks while on duty, calling this 'time theft'. Apple inspects the personal belongings of its retail workers, some of whom lose up to a half-hour of unpaid time every day as they wait in line to be searched. Tyson prevents its poultry workers from using the bathroom. Some have been forced to urinate on themselves while their supervisors mock them.

About half of US employees have been subject to suspicionless drug screening by their employers. Millions are pressured by their employers to support particular political causes or candidates. Soon employers will be empowered to withhold contraception coverage from their employees' health insurance. They already have the right to penalize workers for failure to exercise and diet, by charging them higher health insurance premiums. (Anderson, 2017)

While one cannot say this is true of every workplace, here I am exaggerating for effect, after all exaggeration is when the truth loses its temper, the point is that these 'private governments' control individuals qua employees, usually without any or much inclusion the voice of workers or countervailing power by workers, or transparency and accountability in managerial decision-making. The scope of unelected, arbitrary power and authority bosses have over workers and thus the real and present danger of causing multiple and complex forms of on-going and sustained harms, dominating people, denying their liberty and dignity and so on, is such that it should be of pressing concern for civic republicans.¹²

Of interest here from a green republican political economy point of view is that the main justification used for maintaining (and extending) workplace dictatorships and denying democracy in the workplace is efficiency and the maximisation of production. In a word, growth. Introducing democracy and worker voice into the workplace could lower productivity (and think of the constant media, government and orthodox economic research pointing out 'productivity gaps and weaknesses' which hold back a firm, a sector or a region) from exporting and producing more and growing. But what if such a

¹² The surveillance and micro-management of workers in the modern workplace is so varied, pervasive, subtle and acculturated that we do not think about it much. And the historical struggles of worker is dominated by analyses of issues around employment, contracts, pay, pensions, and less about conditions of work. For example, an example of the forgotten despotism of workplaces and workplace struggles is the right of workers to urinate, something which took longer in America than other capitalist industrial countries (Linder and Nygaard, 1998). The indignity of this speaks volumes and it was defended on grounds of 'economic efficiency' and in the service of productivity (and creating the conditions for a docile workforce).

linear and instrumental focus on enhancing productivity and orthodox efficiency were less dominant? While for straightforwardly ecological reasons around 'limits to growth' we could envisage a green republican policy preference for this, what I point to here (notwithstanding it has not been fleshed out completely) is the how democratising employment (which I also think is a precondition for the realising of some of the internal goods of employment such as autonomy, self-direction, creativity and collaboration) is an obvious policy choice from a republican point of view as a way of both realising citizenship practices and cultivating its associated virtues and reducing forms of domination and unfreedom.

From employment to work

“Having real control of our work and time not only means improving the quality of work, it also means expanding the proportion of our lives when we do not have to do paid work at all”. (nef, 2016: 36)

A strong case can be made that a post-productivist, post-growth political economy is also a 'post-employment' (whether market or state-based) one, and one in which unpaid, non-remunerated forms of work increases.

Alongside the long-standing green economic proposal for a universal basic income, the reduction of the working week is another policy which restructures the economy to enable it to become more sustainable and meet non or more than economic human ends. As the new economics foundation puts it:

“A 'normal' working week of 21 hours could help to address a range of urgent, interlinked problems: overwork, unemployment, over-consumption, high carbon emissions, low well-being, entrenched inequalities, and the lack of time to live sustainably, to care for each other, and simply to enjoy life”. (nef, 2010; 2)

A shorter working week could help break the habit of 'living to work', working to earn and earning to consume; help distribute paid work more evenly across the population, reducing ill-being associated with unemployment, long working hours and too little control over time; enable paid and unpaid work to be distributed more equally between women and men. It would enable what the nef terms the 'core economy' to flourish by making more and better use of uncommodified human resources in defining and meeting individual and shared needs outside the market economy and the state welfare systems.

The 'core economy' is the non-commodified set of assets, resources and relationships that sustain human life, the 'common good' of human sociality, it is related to what others have termed the 'life world' (Habermas) or has been called the 'social economy' (Barry and Smith) and related (but problematic) terms such as 'social capital' (Putnam). These assets, resources and relationships do not have a market price, are produced for free (but not without human labour/work), and do not make profits or aimed to fulfil

bureaucratic objectives of the state. Its most important component is time, hence the positive impacts of restructuring the existing money economy via a basic income or reducing the formal working week would have on allowing more time for the core economy to grow, deepen and develop. So, while the formal, capitalist/money economy (which includes the state sector) would be governed by a 'post-growth' imperative macro-economically (even while allowing distributed growth between micro-economic sectors – i.e. differentiated as opposed to undifferentiated growth), a post-growth (and post- or low-carbon) sustainable economy (now expanded to include the core economy and to include work as well as employment) does allow and indeed call for expansion and growth of the core economy. And while a much more complicated story, the basic idea here is that beyond the social and ecological limits of the quantitative economy lies the limitless qualitative economy, beyond economic growth lies human social development.

Conclusion

We have enough evidence that orthodox economic growth beyond a threshold undermines human well-being, is corrosive of community cohesion and social solidarity. There comes a point where in answering the political economy question 'what the economy is for?' involves the threshold beyond which economic growth becomes 'uneconomic growth'. For this reason we need to remember that while the end or limiting of economic growth is a major problem for capitalism, this does not automatically translate into this being a problem for individuals or communities. But only if we adopt the invitation of a green republican political economy perspective, and begin to politically and creatively imagine 'economic policy' beyond 'neoclassical economics'; the 'economy' beyond the 'market'; and 'work' beyond 'employment'.

Viewing productive work/employment as a 'disutility', and workers as 'skivers', both serve the 'core state/social imperative' of economic growth (Barry, 2018). Either the compensation of the later for the former (which is both a 'you can't break an omelette without breaking eggs' argument' and a macro-economic version of wage compensation), or a generalised believe in a particular sense of 'social progress', can be used to explain how undemocratic and unfree workplaces are organised and legitimated with capitalist socio-economic orders. The productivity imperative within non-democratic workplaces results in both macro-economically ecologically unsustainable as well as illiberty-producing and unfreedom-reinforcing practices at the micro-economic level. In this way what is briefly sketched in this paper means that a new 'macro-economics of sustainability' (Jackson, 2017; Nadal, 2011) also requires what might be termed 'micro-economics of democratisation'.

A green republican political economy needs to challenge the ideology of growth within a consumer capitalist economic system, including proposing to move beyond carbon and indeed beyond the 'employment society'. In the interests of human flourishing, the creation of a sustainable economy which can also

enable the flourishing of the more than human world, and creating a democratic and democratising society and economy, one that enhances human spheres freedom, while ensuring common goods, this political economy seeks to replace the 'live to work, work to earn, earn to consume' treadmill of contemporary production and consumption. Or rather contemporary productivism and consumerism. And key to this is to envisage political economies beyond orthodox, undifferentiated economic growth as a permanent feature of society. As Illich noted, 'Wherever the shadow of economic growth touches us, we are left useless unless employed on a job or engaged in consumption' (Illich, 1978: 10). Time to step out of the shadows.

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