

# Capitalism

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# 1

## Capitalism



“Capitalism” means “an economy controlled by whoever already has capital”

Capitalism is a human invention

*Rulers **invented** capitalism* basically to extract more from the peasant communities by compelling farmers to extract more from the land and expelling surplus land labour into new industries.

Evolving Capitalism.

Jason Hickel: People assume that capitalism is a system defined by markets and trade. But these pre-existed capitalism by thousands of years. What distinguishes capitalism is that it is organized around perpetual expansion and accumulation, which is euphemistically referred to as “growth”. This requires: -enclosure to generate proletarianization -artificial scarcity to generate competitive productivity -an extractive relationship with nature and labour to enable

surplus accumulation -“frontiers” where nature and labour can be cheapened and costs externalized Such a system is incompatible with ecology, and incompatible with any vision for a world that’s free of poverty, exploitation and structural inequality. We need to have an open conversation about whether such a system is actually worth clinging to in the 21st century.

Kate Raworth: It’s just an ultimate absurdity that in the 21st century, when we know we are witnessing the death of the living world unless we utterly transform the way we live, that death of the living world is called ‘an environmental externality.’

## 2

# Accumulation (Growth)

Accumulation is *elite accumulation*!

Growth is a problem over and above capitalism. Like it not, growth is bound to come to an end, the question is how; and whether this will happen soon or too late to avert planetary disasters. There is too much superfluous activity under capitalism, which serves nothing else but the need of capitalists to extract surplus value and make profits.

Growth requires accumulation and accumulation comes with exploitation.

Like a snake biting its own tail, economic growth is limited because it is inevitably based on the unsustainable exploitation of reproductive labour and ecosystem provisioning.

If socialism means the end of exploitation, it also means the end of endless accumulation. Again: this is socialism without growth.

Kallis-Parrique

Degrowth from a standpoint of a purely rational approach to fundamentally shifting an economy that is currently heating the world to death, guaranteeing centuries of mass death and destruction. The only way to slow the rapid race to collapse civilization and accelerate extinctions is to stop the omnicidal political economy that rules the globe. Given the natural limits that thermodynamics and terrestrial ecologies impose on human economies and non-human populations, degrowth is inevitable: it's just a matter of deciding whether human agency will play a positive, benevolent role in the process, or continue to maximize the chaos and violence involved.

On Hickel's 'Less is More'

Capitalism has always required "frontiers", external to itself, from which to extract cheap nature and cheap labour. It should come as no surprise that such

a system produces perpetual ecological crises and keeps most of the world's population below subsistence levels of income. (Jason Hickel)

What we call “growth” is ultimately a process of enclosure, commodification, and elite accumulation. That anyone would regard this as a reasonable objective for the economy, or indeed as a proxy for human progress, is testament to the totalizing ideological power of capital. (Jason Hickel)

The apparent paradox of high and rising average standard of living despite a mounting environmental toll has come at a great cost to the stability of humanity's medium- and long-term life-support system. In other words, humanity is running an ecological Ponzi scheme in which society robs nature and future generations to pay for boosting incomes in the short term

Bradshaw: Underestimating Avoiding Ghastly Future (pdf)



### 3

## Affluence

### *Memo*

Allocating environmental impacts to consumers is consistent with the perspective that consumers are the ultimate drivers of production, with their purchasing decisions setting in motion a series of trade transactions and production activities, rippling along complex international supply-chain networks <sup>5</sup> . However, allocating impacts to consumers does not necessarily imply a systemic causal understanding of which actor should be held most responsible for these impacts. Responsibility may lie with the consumer or with an external actor, like the state, or in structural relations between actors. Scholars of sustainable consumption have shown that consumers often have little control over environmentally damaging decisions along supply chains <sup>6</sup> , however they often do have control over making a consumption decision in the first place. Whilst in Keynesian-type economics consumer demand drives production, Marxian political economics as well as environmental sociology views the economy as supply dominated.

Remarkably, consumption (and to a lesser extent population) growth have mostly outrun any beneficial effects of changes in technology over the past few decades

Considering that the lifestyles of wealthy citizens are characterised by an abundance of choice, convenience and comfort, we argue that the determinant and driver we have referred to in previous sections as consumption, is more aptly labelled as affluence.

A suitable concept to address the ecological dimension is the widely established avoid-shift-improve framework outlined by Creutzig et al. <sup>43</sup> . Its focus on the end-use service, such as mobility, nutrition or shelter, allows for a multi-dimensional analysis of potential impact reductions beyond sole technological change. This analysis can be directed at human need satisfaction or decent living standards—an alternative perspective put forward for curbing environ-

mental crises 44,45 . Crucially, this perspective allows us to consider different provisioning systems (e.g. states, markets, communities and households) and to differentiate between superfluous consumption, which is consumption that does not contribute to needs satisfaction, and necessary consumption which can be related to satisfying human needs

Carbon emissions and material use are globally more unequally distributed when accounted for as footprints. In contrast to territorial allocations, footprints attribute environmental burdens to the final consumer, no matter where the initial environmental pressure has occurred. Here, international trade is responsible for shifting burdens from mostly low-income developing-world producers to high-income developed-world consumers

*Growth imperatives* are active at multiple levels, making the pursuit of economic growth (net investment, i.e. investment above depreciation) a necessity for different actors and leading to social and economic instability in the absence of it 7,52,60 . Following a Marxian perspective as put forward by Pirgmaier and Steinberger 61 , growth imperatives can be attributed to capitalism as the currently dominant socio-economic system in affluent countries 7,51,62 , although this is debated by other scholars

The average energy intensity of labour is now twice as high as in 1950. As long as a firm has a competitive advantage, there is a strong incentive to sell as much as possible.

Under normal economic conditions, this capitalist competition is expected to lead to aggregate growth dynamics

If labour productivity continuously rises, then aggregate economic growth becomes necessary to keep employment constant, otherwise technological unemployment results. This creates one of the imperatives for capitalist states to foster aggregate growth, since with worsening economic conditions and high unemployment, tax revenues shrink, e.g. from labour and value-added taxes, while social security expenditures rise

Consumers usually increase their consumption in tune with increasing production 60 . This process can be at least in part explained by substantial advertising efforts by firms

Following this analysis, it is not surprising that the growth paradigm is hegemonic, i.e. the perception that economic growth solves all kinds of societal problems, that it equals progress, power and welfare and that it can be made practically endless through some form of supposedly green or sustainable growth

Taken together, the described dynamics create multiple dependencies of workers, firms and states on a well-functioning capital accumulation and thus wield more material, institutional and discursive power (e.g. for political lobbying) to capitalists who are usually the most affluent consumers

An individual's happiness correlates positively with their own income but neg-

atively with the peer group's income 71 and that unequal access to positional goods fosters rising consumption 52 . This endless process is a core part of capitalism as it keeps social momentum and consumption high with affluent consumers driving aspirations and hopes of social ascent in low-affluence segments 70,72 . The positional consumption behaviour of the super-affluent thus drives consumption norms across the population

Degrowth is defined here as “an equitable downscaling of throughput [that is the energy and resource flows through an economy, strongly coupled to GDP], with a concomitant securing of wellbeing“ 59,p7 , aimed at a subsequent downscaled steady-state economic system that is socially just and in balance with ecological limits

Scientists Warning on Affluence (pdf)



## 4

# Classes

### 4.1 Imperiale Lebensweise

Den kapitalistischen Zentren bleibt dann nur noch der Versuch, ihre Lebensweise durch Abschottung und Ausgrenzung exklusiv zu stabilisieren. Damit bringen die Vertreter dieser Politik, die sich in der Regel selbst als „bürgerliche Mitte“ etikettieren, genau das hervor, was sie als ihren Widerpart begreifen: autoritäre, rassistische und nationalistische Bestrebungen. Dass diese derzeit überall erstarken, liegt auch daran, dass sie sich in der Krise als die eigentlichen, weil konsequenteren Garanten jener Exklusivität inszenieren können, die im Normalbetrieb der imperialen Lebensweise immer schon angelegt ist. Und im Unterschied zu ihren „bürgerlichen“ Konkurrenten vermögen sie ihrer Wählerschaft ein Angebot zu machen, das diese auf eine subalterne Position festlegt und sie gleichzeitig aus ihrer postdemokratischen Passivierung befreit. Nora Räthzel hat diesen Mechanismus im Hinblick auf den Rassismus, wie er sich im Deutschland der frühen 1990er Jahre artikuliert, treffend als „rebellierende Selbstunterwerfung“ bezeichnet. Den Akteuren wird es dabei ermöglicht, „sich als Handelnde in Verhältnissen zu konstituieren, denen sie ausgeliefert sind“.

Es reicht nicht mehr, eine „grüne Revolution“<sup>[11]</sup> oder einen neuen „Gesellschaftsvertrag“<sup>[12]</sup> einzufordern. Denn dies lässt, der starken Rhetorik zum Trotz, die politische Ökonomie der Probleme sowie die imperiale Lebensweise unangetastet. Auch greift es zu kurz, implizit oder explizit darauf zu setzen, dass „die Politik“ aus der unabweisbaren, da wissenschaftlich immer genauer belegten Tatsache der ökologischen Krise endlich die richtigen Konsequenzen zieht. Damit übersieht man, dass der Staat kein möglicher Gegenpol, sondern ein wesentlicher Garant für die institutionelle Absicherung der imperialen Lebensweise ist.

Stattdessen kommt es zunächst darauf an, die ökologische Krise als deutlichen Hinweis auf ein grundsätzlicheres Problem anzuerkennen: Die Produktions- und

Konsumnormen des globalen Nordens, die sich mit dem Kapitalismus herausgebildet und schließlich verallgemeinert haben, lassen sich selbst in ihrer ökologisch modernisierten Variante nur auf Kosten von immer mehr Gewalt, ökologischer Zerstörung und menschlichem Leid aufrechterhalten – und auch dies nur in einem kleinen Teil der Welt. Aufgrund der autoritären, weiter auf Inwertsetzung der Natur und gesellschaftliche Spaltung setzenden Politik erleben wir derzeit eine beispiellose Anhäufung der Widersprüche. Die Reproduktion der Gesellschaft und ihrer biophysikalischen Grundlagen kann über den kapitalistischen Wachstumsimperativ immer weniger gesichert werden. Wir erleben eine Krise des Krisenmanagements, eine Hegemonie- und Staatskrise.

blätter.de

## 4.2 The New American Aristocracy

*Memo*

Understanding America's evolving class system.

Perhaps the best evidence for the power of an aristocracy is the degree of resentment it provokes.

The meritocratic class has mastered the old trick of consolidating wealth and passing privilege along at the expense of other people's children. We are not innocent bystanders to the growing concentration of wealth in our time. We are the principal accomplices in a process that is slowly strangling the economy, destabilizing American politics, and eroding democracy. We seem to be the last to notice just how rapidly we've morphed, or what we've morphed into. The arc of the narrative is simple: Once we were equal, but now we are divided.

Our delusions of merit now prevent us from recognizing the nature of the problem that our emergence as a class represents. We tend to think that the victims of our success are just the people excluded from the club. But history shows quite clearly that, in the kind of game we're playing, everybody loses badly in the end.

We have left the 90 percent in the dust—and we've been quietly tossing down roadblocks behind us to make sure that they never catch up.

The 2010s look much like the 1920s

Economic mobility in the land of opportunity [US] is not high, and it's going down. In America, the game is half over once you've selected your parents.

We are the people of good family, good health, good schools, good neighborhoods, and good jobs. We may want to call ourselves the "5Gs" rather than the 9.9 percent. We are so far from the not-so-good people on all of these dimensions, we are beginning to resemble a new species. The polite term for the process is assortative mating. Rising inequality decreases the number of

suitably wealthy mates even as it increases the reward for finding one and the penalty for failing to do so. For most of us, the process is happily invisible.

It's one of the delusions of our meritocratic class, however, to assume that if our actions are individually blameless, then the sum of our actions will be good for society.

A process that is creating two distinct forms of life in our society.

We prefer to signal our status by talking about our organically nourished bodies, the awe-inspiring feats of our offspring, and the ecological correctness of our neighborhoods. We have figured out how to launder our money through higher virtues.

We're leaving the 90 percent and their offspring far behind in a cloud of debts and bad life choices that they somehow can't stop themselves from making.

The Gatsby Curve has managed to reproduce itself in social, physiological, and cultural capital. Put more accurately: There is only one curve, but it operates through a multiplicity of forms of wealth.

Rising inequality does not follow from a hidden law of economics, as the otherwise insightful Thomas Piketty suggested when he claimed that the historical rate of return on capital exceeds the historical rate of growth in the economy. Inequality necessarily entrenches itself through other, nonfinancial, intrinsically invidious forms of wealth and power. We use these other forms of capital to project our advantages into life itself. We look down from our higher virtues in the same way the English upper class looked down from its taller bodies, as if the distinction between superior and inferior were an artifact of nature. That's what aristocrats do.

According to a 2017 study, 38 elite colleges—among them five of the Ivies—had more students from the top 1 percent than from the bottom 60 percent. In his 2014 book, *Excellent Sheep*, William Deresiewicz, a former English professor at Yale, summed up the situation nicely: “Our new multiracial, gender-neutral meritocracy has figured out a way to make itself hereditary.”

In the United States, the premium that college graduates earn over their non-college-educated peers in young adulthood exceeds 70 percent. The return on education is 50 percent higher than what it was in 1950.

One of the stories we tell ourselves is that the premium is the reward for the knowledge and skills the education provides us. Another, usually unfurled after a round of drinks, is that the premium is a reward for the superior cranial endowments we possessed before setting foot on campus. We are, as some sociologists have delicately put it, a “cognitive elite.”

the fact is that degree holders earn so much more than the rest not primarily because they are better at their job, but because they mostly take different categories of jobs. Well over half of Ivy League graduates, for instance, typically go straight into one of four career tracks that are generally reserved for the well

educated: finance, management consulting, medicine, or law. To keep it simple, let's just say that there are two types of occupations in the world: those whose members have collective influence in setting their own pay, and those whose members must face the music on their own

Americans now turn over \$1 of every \$12 in GDP to the financial sector; in the 1950s, the bankers were content to keep only \$1 out of \$40. The public underwrites the risks; the financial gurus take a seat at the casino; and it's heads they win, tails we lose. The financial system we now have is not a product of nature. It has been engineered, over decades, by powerful bankers, for their own benefit and for that of their posterity.

when educated people with excellent credentials band together to advance their collective interest, it's all part of serving the public good by ensuring a high quality of service, establishing fair working conditions, and giving merit its due. That's why we do it through "associations," and with the assistance of fellow professionals wearing white shoes. When working-class people do it—through unions—it's a violation of the sacred principles of the free market. It's thugish and anti-modern. Imagine if workers hired consultants and "compensation committees," consisting of their peers at other companies, to recommend how much they should be paid. The result would be—well, we know what it would be, because that's what CEOs do.

education has been reduced to a private good, justifiable only by the increments in graduates' paychecks. Instead of uniting and enriching us, it divides and impoverishes

If the system can be gamed, well then, our ability to game the system has become the new test of merit.

Aristocrats always prefer the invisible kind of government. It leaves them free to exercise their privileges.

Real estate alone may account for essentially all of the increase in wealth concentration over the past half century. These are the gold mines of our new economy.

Local zoning regulation imposes excessive restrictions on housing development and drives up prices. What is less well understood is how central the process of depopulating the economic core of the nation is to the intertwined stories of rising inequality and falling social mobility.

saving the local environment, preserving the historic character of the neighborhood, and avoiding overcrowding. In reality, it's about hoarding power and opportunity inside the walls of our own castles. This is what aristocracies do.

Zip code is who we are. It defines our style, announces our values, establishes our status, preserves our wealth, and allows us to pass it along to our children. It's also slowly strangling our economy and killing our democracy.



Americans have trouble telling the difference between a social critique and a personal insult. Thus, a writer points to a broad social problem with complex origins, and the reader responds with, “What, you want to punish me for my success?”

It has taken less than one lifetime for the (never fully formed) meritocracy to evolve into a (fledgling) aristocracy. Class accretes faster than we think. It’s our awareness that lags,

We have intuited one of the fundamental paradoxes of life on the Gatsby Curve: The greater the inequality, the less your money buys.

The source of the trouble, considered more deeply, is that we have traded rights for privileges. We’re willing to strip everyone, including ourselves, of the universal right to a good education, adequate health care, adequate representation in the workplace, genuinely equal opportunities, because we think we can win the game. But who, really, in the end, is going to win this slippery game of escalating privileges?

The political theology of the meritocracy has no room for resentment. We are taught to run the competition of life with our eyes on the clock and not on one another, as if we were each alone. If someone scores a powerboat on the Long Island waterways, so much the better for her. The losers will just smile and try harder next time.

Perhaps the best evidence for the power of an aristocracy is to be found in the degree of resentment it provokes. The surest sign of an increase in resentment is a rise in political division and instability. The 2016 presidential election marked a decisive moment in the history of resentment in the United States. In the person of Donald Trump, resentment entered the White House. It rode in on the back of an alliance between a tiny subset of super-wealthy 0.1 percenters (not all of them necessarily American) and a large number of 90 percenters who stand for pretty much everything the 9.9 percent are not. The counties that supported Hillary Clinton represented an astonishing 64 percent of the GDP, while Trump counties accounted for a mere 36 percent. The median home value in Clinton counties was \$250,000, while the median in Trump counties was \$154,000. There’s a reason why one of Trump’s favorite words is *unfair*. That’s the only word resentment wants to hear. Trump lost college-educated white voters by a humiliating 17 percent margin. But he got revenge with non-college-educated whites, whom he captured by a stomping 36 percent margin.

The historian Richard Hofstadter drew attention to Anti-intellectualism in *American Life* in 1963; Susan Jacoby warned in 2008 about *The Age of American Unreason*; and Tom Nichols announced *The Death of Expertise* in 2017. In Trump, the age of unreason has at last found its hero. The “self-made man” is always the idol of those who aren’t quite making it. He is the sacred embodiment of the American dream, the guy who answers to nobody, the poor man’s idea of a rich man. It’s the educated phonies this group can’t stand.

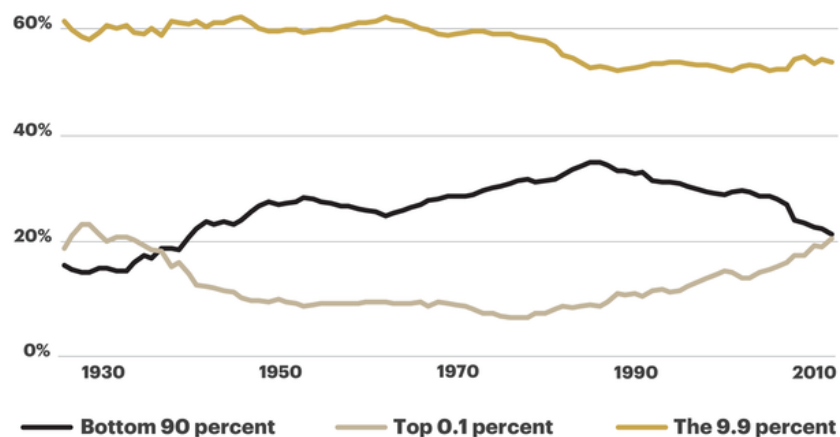
We 9.9 percenters are the staff that runs the machine that funnels resources from the 90 percent to the 0.1 percent. We've been happy to take our cut of the spoils.

The politics of resentment is a means of increasing inequality, not reducing it.

we are next in line for the chopping block. As the population of the resentful expands, the circle of joy near the top gets smaller.

The defining challenge of our time is to renew the promise of American democracy by reversing the calcifying effects of accelerating inequality.

The kind of change that really matters is going to require action from the federal government. That which creates monopoly power can also destroy it; that which allows money into politics can also take it out; that which has transferred power from labor to capital can transfer it back





Matthew Stewart: Birth of a New American Aristocracy (The Atlantic 2018)  
(pdf printout)

Casting himself as the barbarian at the gate, his years stoking the furies of racial resentment, anti-establishment contempt and warped conspiracy theories reached their natural conclusion in the “American carnage” he once promised to end.

Michael Steele, former chairman of the Republican national committee, told the Guardian: “We stopped paying attention to what was happening around us. We started taking for granted each other and we weren’t listening to the things that were driving people’s pain and anguish and frustrations. Our political leadership became absorbed in their own self-interest, in their own re-elections.

The erosion of American democracy has multiple causes – inequality, racism, distrust of institutions, polarisation, media, social media – that predate Trump and will survive him.

“There’s no one thing you can single out with any absolute truth as definitive. It is like making a gumbo and finding the worst ingredients possible and just scratching your head and trying to figure out, why doesn’t this taste right?”

Trump has tapped into the frustration of the sliding status of a group of less well-educated whites

Guardian: Trump’s American Carnage





## 5

## Concentration

## 5.1 Corporative State



*Geir Ivar Jørgensen, Gule Vester Norge:* Vi er eid av den korporative statens eiere Korporativisme av fascistisk kulør er hva vi har med å gjøre Korporasjoner styrer alle samfunnsområder for å tjene et globalisert oligarki av eiere. Beviset bør alle snart ha oppfattet ved hvor mye 1 prosenten eier i forhold til alle andre. Velgerne kan endre på dette, men da må de stemme de korporative eieres politiske lakeier bort fra makten. I Norge betyr det at velgerne må slutte å stemme på Ap+Erna & Co. fordi det er deres ansvar at vi blir overstyrt av EU via EØS-avtalen. EU er et politisk system som har korporativisme som fundament og struktur. EU er skapt av og for den korporative statens aktører.

## 5.2 Profitable degradation

In recent decades, an unprecedented consolidation among corporate players has taken place around the world. Today, 10 per cent of the world's public companies generate 80 per cent of all profit.

Bankrolling Extinction

## 5.3 Superstars

*Memo Superstars*

As a proportion of GDP, American corporate profits are higher than they have been at any time since 1929.

Pulling ahead of their rivals in one area after another and building up powerful defences against competition, including enormous cash piles equivalent to 10% of GDP in America and as much as 47% in Japan.

In the 1980s and 1990s management gurus pointed to the “demise of size” as big companies seemed to be giving way to a much more entrepreneurial economy. Giants such as AT&T were broken up and state-owned firms were privatised. High-tech companies emerged from nowhere. Peter Drucker, a veteran management thinker, announced that “the Fortune 500 [list of the biggest American companies] is over.” That chimed with the ideas of Ronald Coase, an academic who had argued in “The Nature of the Firm” (1937) that companies make sense only when they can provide the services concerned more cheaply than the market can.

But now size seems to matter again. The McKinsey Global Institute, the consultancy's research arm, calculates that 10% of the world's public companies generate 80% of all profits. Firms with more than \$1 billion in annual revenue account for nearly 60% of total global revenues and 65% of market capitalisation.

The share of nominal GDP generated by the Fortune 100 biggest American companies rose from about 33% of GDP in 1994 to 46% in 2013, and the Fortune 100's share of the revenues generated by the Fortune 500 went up from

57% to 63% over the same period. The number of listed companies in America nearly halved between 1997 and 2013, from 6,797 to 3,485, according to Gustavo Grullon of Rice University and two colleagues, reflecting the trend towards consolidation and growing size. Sales by the median listed public company are almost three times as big as they were 20 years ago. Profit margins have increased in direct proportion to the concentration of the market.

Startups, meanwhile, have found it harder to get off the ground. Robert Litan, of the Council on Foreign Relations, and Ian Hathaway, of the Brookings Institution, note that the number of startups is lower than at any time since the late 1970s, and that more companies die than are born, pushing up their average age.

The superstar effect is particularly marked in the knowledge economy. In Silicon Valley a handful of giants are enjoying market shares and profit margins not seen since the robber barons in the late 19th century. “Competition is for losers,” says Peter Thiel, a co-founder of PayPal, a payments system, and the first outside investor in Facebook. On Wall Street the five largest banks have increased their share of America’s banking assets from 25% in 2000 to 45% today.

Today’s superstar companies are big in different ways from their predecessors. In the old days companies with large revenues and global footprints almost always had lots of assets and employees. Some superstar companies, such as Walmart and Exxon, still do. But digital companies with huge market valuations and market shares typically have few assets.

Yet even “old” big companies employ far fewer people than they used to. Exxon, the world’s most successful oil company, has cut back its workforce from 150,000 in the 1960s to less than half that today, despite having merged with a giant rival, Mobil.

The “new” big companies are becoming more like the corporations of yore. High-tech companies often give senior jobs to former Washington insiders and employ armies of lobbyists. Many modern superstar companies park their money in off-shore hideaways and devote considerable efforts to keeping down their tax bills. Superstar companies tend to excel at everything they do—including squeezing as much as they can out of government while paying the lowest possible taxes.

The age of entrepreneurialism, ushered in by Britain’s Margaret Thatcher and America’s Ronald Reagan, is giving way to an age of corporate consolidation even as most companies are becoming more virtual.

Rise of superstars - Economist (pdf-printout)

## 5.4 Land Oligopoly

“When the billionaires buy up all the farmland, you can feel the late stages of civilization collapse” (Joe Brewer)



Bill Gates, the fourth richest person in the world has been quietly snatching up 242,000 acres of farmland across the U.S. — enough to make him the top private farmland owner in America. Gates, who has a net worth of nearly \$121 billion according to Forbes, has built up a massive farmland portfolio spanning 18 states. His largest holdings are in Louisiana (69,071 acres), Arkansas (47,927 acres) and Nebraska (20,588 acres). Additionally, he has a stake in 25,750 acres of transitional land on the west side of Phoenix, Arizona, which is being developed as a new suburb.

This is not Gates' only foray into agriculture. In 2008, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation announced \$306 million in grants to promote high-yield, sustainable agriculture among smallholder farmers in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. The foundation has further invested in the development and proliferation of “super crops” resistant to climate change and higher-yield dairy cows.

It is not entirely clear how Gates' farmland is being used, or whether any of the land is being set aside for conservation. (Cascade did not return Forbes' request for comment.) However, there is some indication that the land could be used in a way that aligns with the foundation's values. Cottonwood Ag Management, a subsidiary of Cascade, is a member of Leading Harvest, a nonprofit that promotes sustainable agriculture standards that prioritize protections of crops, soil and water resources.

While Gates may be the country's biggest farmland owner, he by no means is the largest individual landowner. In its list of 100 top American landowners, The Land Report gives the top spot to Liberty Media Chair John Malone, who owns 2.2 million acres of ranches and forests. CNN founder Ted Turner ranked number three with 2 million acres of ranch land across eight states. Even Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos is investing in land on a large scale, landing the 25th spot with his ownership of 420,000 acres, mainly in west Texas.

Land Oligopoly



## 6

# Decoupling

Decoupling: *the end of the correlation between increased economic production and decreased environmental quality.*

### *Conclusion*

The needed decoupling does not occur! Not GLOBAL, not FAST-ENOUGH, not LONG-ENOUGH.

Decoupling as a main or single strategy to combine economic and environmental aims should be judged as taking a very large risk with our common future.

The claim that the economy can grow while at the same time the “environmental bads” diminish needs further support from sources other than empirical research literature. The claim needs to be supported by detailed and concrete plans of structural change that delineate how the future will be different from the past.

### *Memo*

Distinctions between impact and resource decoupling, and relative and absolute decoupling are a staple in the literature. Decoupling the growth of economy can be discussed in terms of resource use (resource decoupling) or environmental impact (impact decoupling).

An important conceptual distinction to be made is between absolute (strong) and relative (weak) decoupling. Relative decoupling means that economic growth is faster than the growth of environmental damage or resource use, even though the latter may still be growing.

Absolute decoupling, in turn, means that the economy is growing while the amount of resource use and/or environmental impact is decreasing. relative decoupling does not necessarily lead to absolute decoupling. Relative decoupling

due to, for instance, increased material efficiency, may continue for long periods of time without ever turning into absolute decoupling.

Relative decoupling is, by definition, connected to increased impacts and/or resource use, so in order to evaluate the pertinence of evidence of relative decoupling it is necessary to investigate what are the structural reasons for the relative decoupling, and find out if they are such that they can continue and intensify into absolute decoupling.

Local decoupling does not necessarily entail global decoupling. Decoupling becomes problematic when outsourcing and trade are taken into account

Making decoupling a continuous phenomenon is harder than achieving decoupling for a limited period of time, as continuous decoupling entails permanent changes in structures of production. Only long-enough periods of analysis provide reliable information on prevailing trends.

One of the problems widely discussed with relation to sectoral decoupling is the phenomenon of *rebound* or so-called *Jevons' paradox*.

It is easy to achieve resource decoupling in comparison to impact decoupling. An economy may relatively easily replace a harmful substance, such as ozone-depleting CFC gases, and thus be absolutely decoupled from the specific impact. Indeed, such a decoupling may be achieved by increased material use, if the use of the replacement demand more resources, such as energy. In contrast, a decrease in resource use, whether in terms of DMC or TMR or something similar, demands a wider-reaching change in the functioning of the economy.

Decoupling CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from GDP can very well coexist with unsustainable environmental impacts and resource use

Decoupling is a measure of ecological efficiency, not one of sustainability: even an absolutely decoupled economy can transgress planetary boundaries either through its impacts or its resource use.

Moreover, as climate change threatens to pass the tipping points after which efforts of mitigation become harder (Lenton, 2011; Lenton et al., 2019), the decoupling of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from economic growth has to be sufficiently fast.

The most common case of absolute decoupling reported (50 articles) is between CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and economic growth. It is important to notice, that none of these 50 studies explicitly study the possible effect that trade and outsourcing have on national emission and GDP.

The literature finds evidence of impact decoupling, especially between GHG emissions (such as CO<sub>2</sub> and SO<sub>2</sub> emissions) in wealthy countries for certain periods of time, but not of economy-wide resource decoupling, least of all on the international and global scale. Quite the opposite: there is evidence of increased material intensity and recoupling.

*Vaden (abstract)*

The idea of decoupling “environmental bads” from “economic goods” has been proposed as a path towards sustainability by organizations such as the OECD and UN. Scientific consensus reports on environmental impacts (e.g., greenhouse gas emissions) and resource use give an indication of the kind of decoupling needed for ecological sustainability: global, absolute, fast-enough and long-enough. This goal gives grounds for a categorisation of the different kinds of decoupling, with regard to their relevance. We conducted a survey of recent (1990–2019) research on decoupling on Web of Science and reviewed the results in the research according to the categorisation. The reviewed 179 articles contain evidence of absolute impact decoupling, especially between CO<sub>2</sub> (and SOX) emissions and evidence on geographically limited (national level) cases of absolute decoupling of land and blue water use from GDP, but not of economy-wide resource decoupling, neither on national nor international scales. Evidence of the needed absolute global fast-enough decoupling is missing.

Vaden 2020 Decoupling for sustainability (pdf)



# 7

## Degrowth

Degrowth redefines progress. The goal is to achieve well-being for all, in balance with the Earth's ecosystems, and any step we take in this direction (i.e., degrowth) represents progress.

Degrowth is as anti-capitalist as it gets

The ideology of growth has become the powerhouse of modern capitalism and we do not understand why some socialists are reluctant to join the battle against a phenomenon that is socially divisive and ecologically unsustainable. A socialism without growth but with well-being as its goal is how we reconcile two of the most powerful concepts we have: capitalism and guaranteeing a future.

As is evident by now, we do use the C-word, a lot. Certain Marxist commentators have accused degrowth of never explicitly questioning capitalism. Phillips (2015) depicts degrowth as a “small-scale steady-state capitalism.” The degrowth project some would think resembles the film *Downsizing* (2017), where exuberant consumerism is made environmentally possible by shrinking people down to a few centimetres.

So, let us be clear: degrowth is not miniature capitalism with tiny corporations, tiny speculative financial instruments, and tiny free trade agreements. It is not austerity within capitalism. It is an alternative system of provision altogether – not just smaller and slower, but different.

You may ask why focus on growth and not just capitalism? Well, try to compare the occurrence of “economic growth” versus “capital accumulation” in the news. As Gareth Dale has forcefully argued, economic growth is the ideology that has turned the specific interest of capital to grow (for returns, and for keeping social peace) into a generalized social objective assimilated by the population. This is not an ideology that will go away by refusing to confront it or beautifying it with nice adjectives. The fact that this ideology survived even the end of capitalism (or at least of a certain type of capitalism) in ex-socialist regimes

should give pause for thought. Socialists who defend growth must also think twice whether they are redwashing capital, redressing the dreams that capitalism sells as socialist dreams.

Growth is the child of capitalism, but the child grew up and took over the head of the family. Capitalism's interest in accumulation is promoted and legitimised through – and in the name of – “growth.” The critique of growth is the most fundamental critique of capitalism – one that criticises not only the means capitalism uses but the very ends it sells. This makes degrowth and (eco)socialism natural allies, not adversaries.

Kallis-Parrique

If capitalism calls for scarcity in order to generate more growth, degrowth calls for the opposite: reversing artificial scarcities in order to remove growthist pressures, and indeed to render additional growth unnecessary. Expanding universal public services is key to this (i.e., the opposite of austerity). As for the problem of excess throughput: this is being driven by unnecessary industrial activity (in other words, industrial activity that is organized around exchange-value rather than use-value) and elite accumulation. So that's what we have to degrow.

Of course, one can imagine this being achieved by an authoritarian government, but it wouldn't work very well. The problem with any elitist state structure is that it is removed from the complex realities of regional ecology. You can't manage ecosystems with abstract planning (James Scott's work in *Seeing Like a State* is good on this); it requires the knowledge of people who have a relationship with the land... it requires commoners. We know that when people have collective democratic control over local ecological commons they make decisions to sustain rather than liquidate them. That's the principle we need to build on.

Our relationship with nature will mimic the structure of our society. If we organize society around hierarchy, domination and extraction (which is true of both capitalism and any form of authoritarianism), then our relationship with nature will be hierarchical, dominating and extractive. But if we organize society around egalitarianism, reciprocity and care, then our relationship with nature will be egalitarian, reciprocal and caring. Every human society necessarily relies on nonhuman species; the question is, according to what principles do we incorporate them?

Degrowthism strikes a path that incorporates high-tech solutions to build low-tech, low-harm economies.

Under capitalism, innovations that deliver efficiency improvements lead not to a reduction of energy and resource use, but rather to more energy and resource use, because the gains are reinvested to expand the process of production and consumption. In other words, growthism wipes out our most impressive improvements. When it comes to confronting ecological breakdown, we must realize that it's not our technology that's the problem, it's growth.

*Action*



The first step is to amplify the voices of Indigenous leaders and activists who are already pointing in this direction. The Red Nation movement's tagline says "All Relatives Forever", with relatives here of course referring to both human and nonhuman persons. Consider the implications of such a politics; it is profound – far more radical, and far more inspiring and enriching, than traditional leftist discourse.

The Rights of Nature movement is also promising; the more we talk about rivers, watersheds and ecosystems as persons, with rights to existence, the more this idea becomes thinkable. We don't have to wait for national governments to create such rights; in many places local councils have this power.

### *Fiction*

Ursula Le Guin's *The Dispossessed*. It's a story about a kind of ecosocialist society on another planet. The premise is that the ecosystem is primarily desert, so people have to find ways to sustain a flourishing society with relatively little material throughput. They do it with a firm commitment to egalitarianism, public goods, and direct democracy. They fiercely reject elite accumulation, which they see as dangerously wasteful. Because they do not measure civilization in terms of the quantity of stuff they consume (as our society does), they are free to focus on higher goals: philosophy, science and art. It's worth noting that Le Guin was the daughter of Alfred Kroeber, an anthropologist who spent his career learning from Indigenous communities in the American Southwest. These were people who saw egalitarianism and direct democracy as essential to survival in a desert ecosystem. Le Guin was clearly inspired by their approach to the world.

There's other literature that deals with degrowth themes, although without trying to portray a degrowth society. Michael Ende's *Momo* comes to mind. There's also Hayao Miyazaki's films. Aldous Huxley's *Island*. David Graeber's *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology* explores ethnographic insights that are relevant to degrowth theory. Then there are the writings of anti-colonial leaders like Gandhi, Fanon and Sankara, who rejected growthism and sought to define a more human-centered economics. These are all resources we can draw on as we imagine a more just and ecological civilization.

### *Strategy*

There's a lot of work to be done when it comes to degrowth political strategy. I think what's required is a range of approaches. There are people at the community level working to bring degrowth principles to local economic governance. Transition Towns in the UK are a nascent example of this. So too with cities like Amsterdam and Copenhagen adopting "doughnut economics". We can see it at a national level, too, with New Zealand, Scotland and Iceland choosing to abandon GDP growth as a government objective. I think there's hope at a multilateral level, too: the Environment Committee of the European Parliament just recently voted in favour of binding targets to reduce material throughput

in absolute terms. That's a core degrowth policy. Of course, it's not law yet – but it's a huge step.

The difference between neoliberal political strategy and degrowth is that the former had the backing of billionaires and corporations that bankrolled think tanks, university departments, and media outlets. It also had international financial institutions and the US military, which forcibly imposed the Washington Consensus around the world. Degrowth has to rely almost entirely on social movements. That's a tall order, but we can take inspiration from our ancestors: the anti-slavery movement, the anti-apartheid movement, the anti-colonial movement, the Civil Rights Movement, the labour movement, the feminist movement... all of these have changed the world, against overwhelming odds. That's the scale of what's required of us.

On Hickel's 'Less is More' - Interview

## Green Growth

Most people encounter the growth debate, if they encounter it at all, through the idea of “green growth.” This is a vision for our collective future based on the belief that technological advance will drastically reduce the amount of raw materials needed to sustain growth—a process known as dematerialization—and “decouple” growing GDP from its ecological impacts. As proof that this is not only possible but already happening, boosters of the idea point to the transition by rich countries from manufacturing to service-based economies, as well as efficiency gains in energy and in the use of materials. The process that replaced letters with email, and compact discs with digital files, will continue until we live in a spectral economy where little at all is manufactured or transported, save those things that can be pulled from thin air by, one presumes, solar-powered 3-D printers.

The belief that green growth will save us, also known as “ecomodernism” or “ecopragmatism,” has become a trendy article of faith among elites who acknowledge climate change and the dangers of breaching ecological boundaries. In 2017, Barack Obama threw his support behind the idea in an article for *Science* magazine, maintaining that signs of decoupling in major economies “should put to rest the argument that combatting climate change requires accepting lower growth or a lower standard of living.”

The argument that capitalism can grow itself out of the present crisis may be soothing to those who like the world as it is. It also relies on the kind of accounting tricks and rejection of reality more closely associated with Obama’s successor.

In a growth system, gains in efficiency do not translate to higher wages, greater equality, more leisure, or lower emissions; they are

plowed right back into the growth cycle. A classic example of this dynamic is the advent of the chain saw. A person with a chain saw can cut 10 times as many trees in the same time as a person using older methods. Logging companies did not use this invention, however, to shorten the workweek by 90 percent. They used it to cut 10 times more trees than they otherwise would have. “Lashed by the growth imperative, technology is used not to do the same amount of stuff in less time, but rather to do more stuff in the same amount of time,” “In a system where technological innovation is leveraged to expand extraction and production, it makes little sense to hope that yet more technological innovation will somehow magically do the opposite.”

Defenders of growth often take cheap shots at degrowthers by painting them as anti-science, anti-progress, and all around a bit woo-woo. But the targets of these attacks are straw men, and emerge from a dangerously outdated view of the world. For starters, there was never any basis for the materialist view of nature as an all-you-can-eat buffet of inert “resources.” A number of discoveries across the life and physical sciences have revealed the astounding complexity and cooperation of the systems that support life, from the trillions of microbes that process food in our guts, to planet-scale systems that regulate chemical balances in the atmosphere and oceans. In every field—except, notably, economics—the worldview that allows trees to be seen as timber, and timber as a contributor to GDP, has been overtaken by a second scientific revolution. The picture of the world to emerge from this revolution is both more fragile and more interrelated than the equations found in modern economics textbooks can describe.

Zaitchik on Hickels ‘Less is More’ in *The New Republic*

# 9

## State

*Modern Fossil States*



10

## Climate Finance

Climate Finance assistance to developing countries is NOT on track. Oxfam Report 2020 (News issue)





# History of Capitalism

SMM: Less Is More includes a really fascinating section on the creation story of capitalism. The story is basically of peasants who threw off the rule of aristocrats and built egalitarian communes that also were quite animistic, with an ecologically-minded relationship to non-human (or your great phrase “more-than-human”) life. Rulers invented capitalism to basically extract more from the peasant communities and compel farmers to extract more from the land. The takeaway seems to be that in the absence of such psychopathic aristocrats and autocrats, people generally self-organize into more or less eco-anarchist democracies. There are many examples of Indigenous societies incorporating social tools to maintain democratic politics and prevent wealth and power hoarders from taking over. Are there practical mechanisms (that you didn’t include in Less Is More) that you’d point to for achieving such enviable accountability in modern fossil states, or do we just need to hope for collapses and fragmentation?

JH: It’s worth remembering that the ecological ontologies that characterize many Indigenous communities today are not some kind of timeless trait. They have been formulated in response to capitalism. In most cases these communities, or their ancestors, have had first-hand experience of the violence of colonial capital. They know how destructive it is, to both humans and ecologies, especially on the frontiers of the world-system. Consider the devastation wrought by the European invasion of the Americas, which wiped out 90% of the population and turned vast tracts of land into plantation monoculture and strip mines. That’s the context here. Indigenous communities have seen apocalypse up close, and their ontologies have been formed accordingly, with an acute awareness of the values that are required if we are to thrive together on this planet.

For the first 400 years of its history, capitalism caused immiseration virtually everywhere it went: enclosure, dispossession, genocide, mass enslavement, colonization, famine. It wasn’t until 1870 that we began to see any improvement in life expectancy in Europe, and that was the product of the labour movement

and related struggles for democracy, municipal socialism, and basic interventions like public sanitation, public housing, and public healthcare. We don't see improvement in the global South until progressive movements succeed in achieving decolonization. This history is important, because it reveals that what's required for progress isn't growth as such (as in, an aggregate expansion in the commodity economy), but rather a fair distribution of income and opportunity, and access to universal public goods. It's not rocket science, but it does require a political struggle. So one might say that degrowth redefines progress. The goal is to achieve well-being for all, in balance with the Earth's ecosystems, and any step we take in this direction (i.e., degrowth) represents progress.

On Hickel's 'Less is More' -Interview

## Part I

# Appendices



# Appendix A

## About



*Dyre Haugen* and *Dyrehaugen* is Webian for *Jon Martin* - self-owned Globian, Webian, Norwegian and Canarian with a background from industrial research policy, urban planning and economic development consulting on global, regional and urban scales. I am deeply concerned about the (insane) way humanity (i.e. capitalism) interfere with nature. In an effort to gain insights in how and why this happens stuff is collected from around the web and put together in a linked set of web-sites. The sites are operated as personal notebooks. However, these days things can be easily published to the benefit of others concerned with the same issues. But be aware - this is not polished for presentation or peer-reviewed for exactness. I offer you just to have a look at my 'work-desk' as it appears in the moment. Any comment or suggestion can be mailed to [dyrehaugen@gmail.com](mailto:dyrehaugen@gmail.com) You can follow me on twitter as @dyrehaugen. Thanks for visiting!



# Appendix B

## Links

### Current Dyrehaugen Sites:

- rcap - On Capitalism (loc)
- rclm - On Climate Change (loc)
- recs - On Economics (loc)
- rngy - On Energy (loc)
- renv - On Environment (loc)
- rstb - On Statistics (loc)
- rurb - On Urbanization (loc)
- rvar - On Varia (loc)
- rwsd - On Wisdom (loc)

### Blogs:

- rde - Blog in English (loc)
- rdn - Blog in Norwegian (loc)

### Discontinued:

- jdt - Collection (Jekyll) (loc)
- hdt - Collection (Hugo) (loc)

### Not listed:

- (q:) dhe dhv jrw56
- (z:) rcsa rpad rstart





# Appendix C

## NEWS

### C.1 210111 Increasing the Material Footprint

‘Green Growth’ policies creates euphoria among investment bankers even in the middle of the Corona pandemic. Governmentes around the globe are believed to come up with very strong extraction incentives under the ‘Green Growth’ label.

Extraction Stimulus (The Guardian)

### C.2 210102 A Macabre Spectacle

The central, befuddling economic reality of the United States at the close of 2020 is that everything is terrible in the world, while everything is wonderful in the financial markets. It’s a macabre spectacle. Asset prices keep reaching new, extraordinary highs, when around 3,000 people a day are dying of coronavirus and 800,000 people a week are filing new unemployment claims. Even an enthusiast of modern capitalism might wonder if something is deeply broken in how the economy works.

Why Markets Boomed in a Year of Human Misery (NY Times)

### C.3 210102 Climate Finance Shadow Report 2020

Oxfam has released this report with subtitle *Assessing progress towards the \$100 billion commitment* Progress is NOT in line with need or pledges.

Climate change could undo decades of progress in development and dramatically increase global inequalities. There is an urgent need for

climate finance to help countries cope and adapt. Over a decade ago, developed countries committed to mobilize \$100bn per year by 2020 to support developing countries to adapt and reduce their emissions. The goal is a critical part of the Paris Agreement. As 2020 draws to a close, Oxfam's Climate Finance Shadow Report 2020 offers an assessment of progress towards the \$100bn goal.

Based on 2017–18 reported numbers, developed countries are likely to claim they are on track to meet the \$100bn goal. And on their own terms, they may be. But how the goal is met is as important as whether it is met. The dubious veracity of reported numbers, the extent to which climate finance is increasing developing country indebtedness, and the enduring gap in support for adaptation, LDCs and SIDS, are grave concerns. Meeting the \$100bn goal on these terms would be cause for concern, not celebration.

Oxfam Report (pdf)