



Post-growth Common Sense:

Political Communications for the Future

Rupert Read

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Green House Post-growth Project

Everyone agrees that we are in the midst of a massive financial and economic crisis. We have suffered the biggest crash since the 30s, and it may get far bigger yet. How ought this ongoing crisis to be understood, and resolved?

There is the mainstream view: we have vast government deficits, and stagnant economies. We have a dire need for economic growth – and a deep-set need for austerity, bringing with it massive cuts in public services.

But what if that diagnosis, which reflects mainstream wisdom, is all wrong? What if the crisis that we are currently experiencing is one which casts into doubt the entire edifice of capitalist economics that sets growth as the primary objective of all policy? What if the fight between those who say that without austerity first there can be no growth and those who say that we must invest and borrow more now in order to resume growth is a false dichotomy – because both sides are assuming ‘growthism’ as an unquestioned dogma?

The aim of the Green House Post-growth Project is to challenge the common sense that assumes that it is ‘bad news’ when the economy doesn’t grow and to analyse what it is about the structure of our economic system that means growth must always be prioritised. We need to set out an attractive, attainable vision of what one country would look like, once we deliberately gave up growth-mania – and of how to get there. And we need to find ways of communicating this to people that make sense, and that motivate change.



Existing Green House Post-growth Project Reports

‘Green House’s ‘Post-growth’ Project: an introduction’ by Rupert Read.

‘Joined up Economics: The Political Economy of Sustainability, Financial Crises, Wages, Equality and Welfare’ by Brian Heatley.

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‘Post-growth Common Sense: Political Communications for the Future’ by Rupert Read.

Forthcoming Green House Post-Growth Project Reports

‘How to Make, Do and Mend our Economy: Rethinking Capital Investment in Construction and Industry, the Scale and Depth of the Challenge of the Green Transition’ by Jonathan Essex.



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Dedication

This report is dedicated to the memory of Matt Wootton, 1978-2013. Matt was to have co-written the report with me. The ideas in it owe much to discussion with him, though I should stress that I have no way of knowing whether he would have agreed with the report as I have written it up. In fact, I am reasonably confident that he would not have done in respect of some nuances, at least.

We had a creative disagreement (at least, a verbal disagreement) about the topic of this report, a little of which is indexed here: <http://www.greenwordsworkshop.org/node/40>; see the comments thread (<http://www.greenwordsworkshop.org/node/40#comments>), which is well worth reading. Matt rightly saw that the frame of ‘growth’ is typically a positive one (though see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bqz3R1NpXzM>), and a ‘natural’ one (biological growth is *prima facie* good (though think of cancer)). My thought, which I think Matt would not have dissented from, is that the idea of ‘growth’ has been stolen from us, has had all sense of there being any limits (to lifespan, to desires, to resources) stripped out of it, and inserted into a domain, that of economic materialism, where it does great harm.

Part of the joy and challenge of writing this report *together* would have been the working through of the creative disagreement that Matt and I had on this concept and topic. I’m so sad that that will never now happen. Fortunately, the ‘handbook’ we were working on together, *The values revolution*, was at a somewhat more advanced stage of mutual work and agreement. So that *will* (in due course) appear under *both* our names, co-authored (probably with Compass, as an ebook).

Matt was a precocious genius of political communications. That he is and will be much missed is a gross understatement. I hope that this report is worthy of his memory.¹

“We don’t want to live better. We want to live well.” – Evo Morales.

“A world begins when its metaphor is born.” – William Ophuls.



The author

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Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Green House colleagues for their helpful comments on previous drafts of this report.

In lieu of a summary

It isn't really possible to summarise this report. Because it is written to represent and evoke a journey, a 'therapeutic' voyage through and to (a new) common sense. It is as much a reflective essay as a report. I can only ask the reader to read it, and to think as they go.

There are however Recommendations' at the end, which the highly-time-stressed reader² could I suppose try skipping straight to. If they must.

Introduction

The term “post-growth”, in this Green House post-growth project that we are now close to completing, has been a place-holder. We know what we are against: growthism. The idea that the economy should get larger and larger, forever.³ The idea that material throughput can go on rising, or that its stabilizing and falling is consistent with what is called ‘economic growth’ (This is the fantasy of ‘green growth’). But what are we *for*?

Of course, most of our reports in this project – see <http://www.greenhousethinktank.org/page.php?pageid=postgrowth> – sketch substantial elements of what we are for...

But how is this to be overarchingly conceived? I.e. What is it to eventuate in, if successful, at the level of framing? How is it to be framed, communicated, and argued for? Most simply: What is it to be called? It is not enough, in our view, simply to speak of a ‘post-growth’ future. This defines what we want only by reference to the failed status-quo. We must have – there must be – some way of thinking positively of what we want, of what we are calling for. Historically, the most popular designation for this was: the steady-

state economy.⁴ I mentioned others in the report that launched this project.⁵ ‘Dynamic equilibrium’ economy was one.⁶ This has the advantage over ‘steady-state’ that it gives a proper sense of the post-growth economy being a place of dynamism, not of stasis. It has the disadvantage that it sounds as if it might have something to do with equilibrium models of neoclassical economics – the opposite of the truth.

Is there a better term/goal available? One that is justly famed is of course ‘degrowth’, popular particularly in France. This has the virtue of plain speaking: if we are to build down the economy to a size compatible with ecological limits, we are going to have (to have) some degrowth. Probably a lot. Better that it is carefully controlled,⁷ aimed for as policy, rather than being forced on us in a collapse scenario. ‘Degrowth’ has the disadvantage of still being defined negatively, as what it is not. And it has no appealing ‘positive narrative’ nested implicitly within it, in the way that ‘dynamic equilibrium’ *does*.

What then is the answer? How *should* we describe the post-growth economy? Where is the term or frame that we are looking for?

That was the central appointed task of this report.

A note on methodology

Readers not interested in the *methodological* questions at play in respect of the topic of this report may wish to skip this lengthy section.

In what follows, I shall marshal the best thinking that I think available, to bring it to bear on the questions indexed above. But I shall mostly *not* draw on the social/human ‘*sciences*’, in doing so.⁸ Why is this report done ‘in the abstract’? Why does it proceed using mainly philosophical, political and linguistic reflection, rather than (say) psychological testing?

A glib answer would be that it is written by a political- and linguistic-philosopher (who is a practicing politician, as well as an intellectual); but that could of course hardly stand by itself as an adequate answer. A practical answer would be that psychological testing would cost money, money that at present Green House doesn’t have; that answer too could hardly be adequate, if such road-testing of the ideas proposed here were necessary for their validity.

Here is the real answer: such testing is not necessary, and in fact not even possible. Nor is it necessary for psychological theory or evidence to ‘underpin’ what is argued here.

‘Common Cause’

(<http://valuesandframes.org/>) is allegedly underpinned by such evidence and theory; this alleged need for such underpinning is the weakest element of it, in my view. The ‘circumplex’

(<http://valuesandframes.org/handbook/2-how-values-work/>) beloved by Common Cause fans is potentially antithetical to the *leadership* offered by the values-based approach⁹ (as opposed to what I would call the

‘green social marketing’ approach of Dade and Rose¹⁰). The dangerous idea that the ‘circumplex’ gives one is that being powerful and achieving things is necessarily opposed psychologically to being universalistic and benevolent in one’s values. But: We need to pioneer a renewed sense of shared responsibility for the future. We need to *lead* the way¹¹ successfully to this goal as a common cause. This is going to take a great deal of... achievement.¹² To suggest, as the psychological circumplex does, that we are stuck in a situation in which actually winning is incompatible with the values we need is disastrous. Human existence is ‘dialectical’. Psychological reality is not fixed in the way that the values approach risks suggesting that it is. It is not a scientisable object.¹³

The Schwartzian/Cromptonian approach could potentially be modified to deal with my criticisms here.¹⁴ I hope it will be. The modifications required would include for the social psychology to be clear that it is not for all time; just a slightly crude and vague snapshot of the present time in particular societies.¹⁵ The pursuit of power/achievement and the pursuit of social justice etc. are not irreconcilable: it is just that these two things are at present difficult to pursue simultaneously.

It’s very important moreover to be clear about what we mean by ‘power’ and ‘achievement’. Schwartz defines ‘power’ as “social status and prestige, control or dominance over people and resources”; ‘achievement’ as “personal success through demonstrating competence according to social standards”. These are prejudicial definitions. They should be changed, or else it should be accepted that the actuality of the achievement (e.g.) of political power is not necessarily to be

understood according to anything represented in the circumplex. I.e.: One can pursue and achieve political power, for the common good, without actually falling under these definitions! Moreover, the Schwartzian approach at times tacitly denigrates sociality and applauds individuality – this is almost certainly a cultural bias probably resulting from the unaware absorption of elements of contemporary Western (especially American) ‘common sense’ into an allegedly scientific psychology of humanity. There is nothing wrong (and much right) with seeking to match up to social standards: provided that the standards in question are not corrupt. The value in themselves of society and of community risks tacitly being undervalued by a (tacit) individualism motivating the circumplex.

Now: If we are to redefine ‘power’ then Tillich’s distinction (popularized by Martin Luther King) between ‘power-to’ and ‘power-over’ is useful. Unthinking ‘power-over’ can tend to be antithetical to love; ‘power-to’ is a crucial component of it. But note my careful wording in the previous sentence: in a representative democracy, it is not the case that ‘power-over’ is necessarily antithetical to love: on the contrary, it is often the mechanism for mutual constraint, mutually-agreed, to good ends (Think of expropriation of absentee-landlords; or of the socio-political force necessary for the creation of the NHS. Think of someone like Mandela as a leader - and an achiever.)

Those seeking to achieve political power for good ends must of course not lose sight completely of the means they use, lest they become corrupt; but often, in what they seek to achieve, as they work on a day to day level, they will not be thinking much in a

reflective way about those means, nor even of the good ends they are seeking. They will simply have their heads down in pursuit of being elected, etc.. Any account of social and political change which demonises this, including the driving desire to achieve positions of power, is part of the problem rather than of the solution. Because it leaves the whole system open to domination by the friends of the rich and powerful, the ill-intentioned, and the purely selfish.

Somewhat similarly, in terms of criticism and a potential responsive modification: The Lakoff ‘reframing’ approach, as integral to my approach as an emphasis on values, is at its weakest when it claims scientific legitimacy, on the basis of taking Psychology / Cognitive Science to be a science on all fours with real sciences. Lakoff doesn’t need the claim that frames *are* cognitive realities in the brain; it is enough that we understand how frames (whatever exactly they ‘are’) structure thought and language, especially political language. We can do this via examples, cases. Moreover: Lakoff’s main contribution to actually developing a new common sense has been his *creative* work. I mean his actually coming up with new frames / reframes. Now the question is: does one need to know any ‘cognitive science’ in order to do this? The answer is clear: No.

The genius of Common Cause’s Tom Crompton is to show how a social marketing approach, however greenspun, will almost certainly fail if pursued in isolation because of its short-termism, and to show how subtle can be the process of leadership in the direction of the values we need to water the seeds of (e.g. The best way to campaign for ecology at a given time might be to defend the NHS as a

public institution; a campaign to ban advertising that is targeted at children¹⁶ can be an ideal all-purpose good-values-fomenter). The genius of Lakoff (and also of Drew Westen) is to show how a ‘fact-based’ or policy-wonk-style approach (the standard approach of ‘the Left’ today as well as of the centre, and of most think-tanks¹⁷) will fail because of its failure to engage with sentiments, with frames that structure the use of facts, and to model instead the devising of frames that can actually work, and start to move society in the direction it needs to be moved in.

I have argued at length elsewhere¹⁸ against the scientism that is, I submit, to be found at the foundations of the dubious moments in Crompton and Lakoff (and in most of their followers) that I have indexed above - as in most of our culture. I won’t repeat those arguments here; but I do assume their broad efficacy.

The scientism latent in Lakoff (and Westen) and Crompton is of course held in common with a more patent scientism in those whose work they rightly are most deeply engaged in rejecting: in, that is, the ‘Rational Choice Theory’ that is largely dominant today in Economics. Moreover, Rational Choice Theory is only varied rather than rejected in ‘Nudge’ theory (of which our own Andy Dobson is an influential critic¹⁹), in most ‘behavioural psychology’, and in ‘experimental economics’. The green values-based deep-reframing approach that I offer²⁰ is a way to use Lakoffian and Cromptonian insights without falling back into a scientism which will of necessity undercut those insights, in part because it suggests a fatalism about ‘human nature’ and a hubristic knowingness about our

alleged knowledge of that nature that is doubly unwarranted.

The deep-reframing work that is above all needed now, in order to make politically possible a post-growth future, is *not* psychology understood as science. It is rather ‘applied philosophy’ of the kind offered here. It is politics carried out via linguistic and rhetorical thinking placed in a setting of engagement with ecological realities. This is continuous with Lakoff and Crompton at their best, in their genius – it is not continuous with the scientific self-image that at times distorts their achievements and that is in the end offered only to provide a would-be legitimacy in a culture that is profoundly deformed by scientism (and, concomitantly, by dangerously technocratic values), a culture where science is venerated as religion once was, and without greater grounds. (And of course such scientism is profoundly antipathetic to the true spirit of science, which is in crucial part one of skepticism, not of holiness and veneration, which lead to unjust authority and dogmatism.)

The work of Green House is above all this deep-reframing work. Thus the present report hopes to stand as a kind of ‘capstone’ to the post-growth project. Without effective political communications, much of the project will float unused. But, ‘ironically’, effective political communications in a situation that demands genuine leadership cannot possibly be a matter of focus groups. What we are about is *changing* the perceived bounds of political and economic possibility. *Changing* what is seen as ‘realistic’. *Reorienting* the political culture of our country (our world) such that the common sense that gets bounced back at politicians from focus groups etc is itself changed.²¹

It is literally not possible to test out in psychological experiments or focus-groups the proposals outlined here. For these are proposals for a society-scale movement, a change from one ideology to another.²² A great transition, a great turning. They are proposals for a new common sense. It is no more possible to test them out than it is to have an evidence-based revolution. A revolution is by definition not a piecemeal reform, by definition not something that can be argued for solely on the basis of facts and evidence. It is a wholesale transformation, by definition a partly-unanticipatable and uncontrollable process of will and emotion and organization and development and dialectics. I am not saying that it will literally take a revolution to bring in a post-growth future.²³ I am saying that both the process of transformation to a self-avowedly post-growth society and that society itself necessitate a kind of conceptual rupture from what we are used to.²⁴ What I will be suggesting below are some ideas for how to make this possible; ways in which we can conceptually midwife the transition, and ways in which the new society will regard itself. This is thought-leadership in its true sense: For these ideas are bound to be in conflict with much contemporary ‘common sense’.²⁵ That is their whole *point*. They are a new common sense. They also, to have any purchase, must of course bear some intelligent and intelligible relation to current common sense (and perhaps especially to the elements of common sense that have clung on against the

growthist and materialist tide that we have endured now for a long time. That is: the new common sense will bring to the forefront again many elements of old common sense: of ‘make-do and mend’, ‘waste not want not’, etc. etc.; I will return to this point). That is the challenge: how to facilitate the emergence of the one from the other. The challenge is not as hard as I have now perhaps made it sound: for growthist ‘common sense’ is shot through with absurdities (growthists nowadays are like Ptolemaic astronomers, struggling to hold back the fresh tide of a new Copernicanism) and is ever-increasingly incompatible with the world we all increasingly intuitively realize we are living in. The new common sense will be to some considerable extent the merest return to sanity.

What the main body of this report (and its recommendations) consist in, then, is an outline of a new common sense which is necessarily also an outline of how we might (begin to) arrive at it. It consists primarily of linguistic and political ‘suggestions’/re-orientations. More precisely: this report doesn’t begin to pretend to arrive at (all) the answer(s). It may offer some answers, or at least some specific ways forward. More importantly, what I hope to do here is to set out a ‘*model*’ or models for *how* to go about answering the questions outlined in the Introduction, above.²⁶ Though we shall see that – it will turn out that – just as important will be to *question* those questions.

How to radically reframe the post-growth economy

This Green House project is, explicitly, self-avowedly, rightly, the post-growth project. ‘Growth’ is above all a concept of economics. This centrality is right,²⁷ because it is economics that rules our time’s politics, through the hegemonic political philosophy of liberalism / neoliberalism. Thus the ‘appointed’ task of this report, as detailed in my Introduction, above. I have tried to hunt around and think out a phrase with which to sum up in a non-place-holding way what our alternative is to a growthist economy. I have tried for years,²⁸ and especially over the last year or so. I can’t say I believe that I have succeeded.

But then it occurred to me that perhaps I was coming at this the wrong way. Perhaps I hadn’t been essaying a deep enough reframe. Perhaps, rather than simply rewording the kind of economy we want to replace a growthist economy with, I needed rather *to question the very centrality to neoclassical economics and neoliberal politics of economy and economics*. It was only once I took the risk of a reframe of this depth that I started to make real progress with this report. For of course the truth is that a central part of the hegemony of growthism in our society today – its almost complete dominance of common sense as manifested for instance in the still-almost-always-taken-for-granted assumption across the entire media that economic growth is desperately-needed, natural, profoundly necessary, permanent, and obviously desirable, rather than an utterly-tenuous necessarily-temporary²⁹ stage of societal change that we in the West have now lived through – is the hegemony of economism in our society

today. The assumption, taken for granted again, that the economy is the most important part of society,³⁰ that nothing must be allowed to challenge or harm it, and, more basically still, that there is such a *thing* as an ‘economy’, that has laws, and that is not simply a way of seeing *what people do*.³¹

These assumptions need to be challenged. An alternative way of seeing matters needs to be offered. A helpful, crucial start-point or at least staging-post is to be clear that economics and the economy ‘itself’ is *a means to an end*. Not a god that needs serving. So: what is/an the economy *for*? What is growth (fantasized as being) *for*? On the second of these questions: Popular answers include that we need growth in order to increase our level of material well-being. This is relatively easily countered, especially in the North of the globe today. One can appeal to people’s desire for security instead, and show how security is in tension with having more stuff. One can more directly point to how money/stuff can’t bring/buy happiness/love.

Another popular answer is that growth is needed to generate jobs. This is only slightly harder to counter. One can point to the Green New Deal³². More radically, and connected with the previous paragraph: one can ask whatever happened to the leisure society? One can suggest that our future will be better if we share more, including our jobs. In this country, the culture of overwork subsists unpleasantly alongside high long-term unemployment. There is a win-win waiting to be had, here. A post-growth future will/can be – if it is deliberately designed and worked for – a future in which most of us don’t have to work

so hard/much, while more of us have some work. ‘Sharing, not ‘growing’’ might be the germ of a slogan to describe this approach.

The fundamental point is this: what one always needs to ask of an economy is what it is for. Rather than to place society as a kind of appendage to the economy, as neoliberalism, weirdly, does.³³

What is needed is not (what had seemed to me necessary, and yet impossible) to come up with a neat phrase to summarise the nature of a post-growth *economy*; what is needed is to make clear that what matters most is the nature of and centrality of a post-growth *society*, in turn through-and-through nested in (and part-constituting) its home, our shared Earth. (The term ‘home’ may at this point helpfully remind us of the etymology of the term ‘economics’, as emphasized in Roger Scruton’s sometimes-helpful neologism, ‘oikophilia’. What we need economics to be(-come) is an ECO-nomics; but what I am getting at here is that it is not enough to recast economics ‘itself’; we need also to re-embed it in what is more fundamental. That is, again: don’t assume that the place provided by mainstream economics discourse has simply to be filled differently. Rather: reconfigure the landscape.³⁴ *Start from* and *aim at* a different place. That is the true task in (and of) essaying a post-growth common sense, I now believe. To refigure our task as that of envisaging and then creating a better society, that can last, in our only and only utterly non-disposable shared *home*.)

Our post-growth project has been to some extent dominated by questions in and from and around economics, and rightly so, for the reasons outlined

earlier. *But* it is also critical to address what any *economics*, however green/ecological, is *for*.

The question of this report thereby becomes: *How do we describe the (kind of) society that we want?*³⁵

A key idea here is that of a *better life*.

To escape the persistent silly stereotype of greenery as requiring a hairshirt and candles in caves,³⁶ we need to explicate how what we are talking about is an *improved* level of well-being.³⁷ This is entirely possible, still, so long as one does not make the mistake of carelessly equating well-being with ‘prosperity’-via-growth. One key to this is to emphasise *quality of life*, rather than standard of living / GDP per capita. And that in turn suggests we base ourselves firmly in the great tradition of *human flourishing*³⁸ that has been with us since at least Aristotle³⁹.

These moves start to distinguish the promise of a better life, if we move carefully, deliberately, and determinedly to a post-growth society, from the superficially-similar-sounding promises of mainstream economists and politicians. A further step is of course to emphasise that we take seriously as they do not that we live on one planet⁴⁰ and that there is absolutely no reason to believe that we can in any meaningful way to any extent escape its absolute constraints. A vital term here, and one that I think has great promise as a term that can contribute to a new common sense, is *one-planet living*. This term has the power to strike many people as common-sensical; a whole set of behaviours and attitudes start to follow from it, and it is not *negative* in the way that to talk of (say) ‘limits to growth’ or ‘degrowth’ can strike people as negative. It is strikingly image-like, it is true,⁴¹ and it is relatively positive.

Some readers⁴² will however by this point be becoming impatient that I have not mentioned the term that has entered popular discourse as apparently embodying the vision that we need, the term that allegedly is or could be the foundation and touchstone

of the new common sense: sustainability. Unfortunately, I am not a fan of this term, and it is now ubiquitous and in some quarters ‘common-sensical’ enough for it to be worthwhile for me to take some time to explain why.

‘Sustainability’?

Why not just embrace the term that has become most widespread to describe what people like us are for: sustainability. Isn't a post-growth economy/society equivalent to a sustainable economy/society? Britain and the entire Western world is awash with talk of ‘sustainability’: it is in virtually every government document, every local Council document, even many corporations have now embraced the concept. Meanwhile, the Third World is awash with talk of ‘sustainable development’. ‘Development’ projects are everywhere, many of them supposedly designed to build or at least to be compatible with ‘sustainability’. And yet many environmental indicators have worsened in recent years, and greenhouse gas emissions are continuing to build in the atmosphere. Quality of life indicators are stalled or going backwards, including even in many Third World countries that have been recipients of massive ‘development aid’.

Is the problem that the litany of talk about ‘sustainability’ has not been taken seriously? Is the problem that the development agenda has not been pursued rigorously enough? Is the problem that the many people (including some of ‘us’) who earn their living through organisations that are explicitly trying to get everyone to be ‘sustainable’ have not been listened to well enough yet?

Perhaps. Indeed, this is surely at least partially true. Much talk of sustainability has been mere talk, and has not, regrettably, been acted on. But there is an alternative possible explanation. The alternative explanation is if anything even more disturbing. It is that the problem does

not lie only or even perhaps primarily in a failure of rigour in pursuing ‘environmentalist’ objectives, in enacting the ‘sustainability’ agenda, or in pursuing ‘development’, but lies rather *in these objectives themselves*.

In other words: Is there something wrong with the very idea of ‘sustainability’,⁴³ or at least of ‘sustainable development’, of ‘environmentalism’? If there is, it will take sustained (sic.) reflection to figure it out. Because these concepts too have become part of contemporary common sense. Controversially, I would claim that they have become the yin to materialism’s and growthism’s yang. And that we are quite literally being ‘developed’ to death.⁴⁴

Does the concept of ‘environment’ tacitly encode nature as something other than us, that needs managing by us (a subject-object dichotomy)? Does ‘sustainability’ tacitly imply that what is needed is essentially to keep the current system going as long as possible with as few adjustments as possible, neglecting the possibility that radical change may be required? (There is a crucial need, in other words, to ask what is being ‘sustained’: I return to this point shortly.) Does ‘development’ suggest that the (‘developed’) industrial countries are a completed model for the Third World to aspire to, without need of question or of multi-directional learning? (See below on this question, too.) Does ‘sustainable development’ problematically presuppose that the direction of travel that we should be moving in is that of ‘development’; but what if development is an objective that, even if achieved, and even if achieved ‘sustainably’ (in the sense of: as sustainably as possible, going on for as long as possible), would be on balance long-term undesirable and

harmful? This section investigates these questions.

The first point to make here is that ‘sustainability’ is experienced by most ordinary citizens today as a piece of rather opaque and alienating jargon. The next point to make is that the idea of ‘sustainability’ *simpliciter* tells us really nothing about the content of a life lived according to it. It contains *no* hint of what a greener, *better* life would look like. Beginning that task is part of my mission in the present report.

And the further point to make is that, as already implied above, the term has in any case been corrupted so profoundly that it isn’t going to be hard to reclaim it. As explicated most devastatingly by George Monbiot: <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/georgemonbiot/2012/jun/22/rio-20-earth-summit-brazil> . ‘Sustainability’ and ‘sustainable development’ have been debased as concepts by being in practice profoundly weakened in their meaning in the passage of time between the original aspirations contained in the Brundtland report and the way in which the terms feature in many local and central government documents now. A powerful technique of holding corrupters of language to account, potentially, is simply openly to recall that sustainability ought to be about actually being able to sustain ourselves indefinitely into the future. It is not enough merely to be able to keep the current system staggering forward for another year or even for another generation; the system needs *to become sustainable for the long-term*.

So far so good, perhaps. But, as suggested above, we need to ask ourselves whether the game is worth the candle. Or have things gone so bad with the term “sustainability” that it

would be better just to let the term go...

Here then is some more detail offering a few deep reasons to believe that it might be:

‘Sustainable’ so far tells one nothing about *what* is being sustained. (See the Monbiot article linked to above.) This makes it easy to turn “sustainability” into an excuse for economic growth. It is not enough to be in favour of sustainability. One *has* to be clear *what* one is in favour of sustaining.

And only certain meanings, certain specifications of that ‘what’ deserve to be counted as actually amounting to something worth, substantively, calling ‘sustainability’, at all. ‘Sustainable growth’, for instance, is not one of them, for reasons made clear by Herman Daly, and recently, by Tim Jackson. Likewise, ‘sustainable aviation’.

For something to actually count as sustainability at all, we must ask, ‘What are you seeking to sustain?’; and only certain answers to that question will leave it plausible that one is actually someone who takes (anything that is actually going to be actually worth calling) sustainability seriously. Such answers might be: a just and ecologically-viable society, or: an ecologically-viable society; etc. .

As we might put it: it has actually to be *possible* (and *plausible*) for something to be indefinitely sustainable, for it to qualify as a candidate for what can be sustainable. This oughtn’t to surprise us... But it implies that ‘sustainability’ is not in itself an objective at all. The real objective is something else: such as ecological sanity, ecological restoration, and/or precaution.

Add to this the following still-deeper worry: I am worried that the very term ‘sustainability’ actually tends somewhat to push one away from understanding the point just made (If

you are interested to hear more than I have space to supply here about my reasons, goto <http://blogs.bournemouth.ac.uk/environmental-change/2011/03/08/the-conference-in-audio-2/> and scroll down to 'Plenary Session' – the Q & A, as well as my own talk here on sustainability, is well worth listening to). In very brief: *I think that the term 'sustainable' and its cognates makes us inclined to think that whatever we put as the next word, whatever is the 'what' that we are seeking do sustainably, might in principle be sustainable.* But this, I've already suggested, isn't true.

I made vaguely-positive noises above about Brundtland, as everyone routinely does. But actually I think the deep worries about sustainability must lead one to worry, ultimately, about Brundtland too. A widely-accepted Brundtlandian definition of 'sustainable development' (SD) runs as follows: 'development that allows us to meet our needs whilst not depriving future generations of the ability to meet their needs.' This definition does not require us to ask any hard questions at all about what 'our needs' really are. A growthist, or a liberal,⁴⁵ will not want to impose any ceiling on those needs. Thus once more 'sustainable development' can all too easily become merely economic growth with some green bells and whistles added to it. I am saying then that even the Brundtland definition of SD itself is problematic, because of the way it tacitly privileges the current generation over future generations. If we really care about future generations, we will offer them our love and care, and not only provide them with what is left over after taking care of our alleged 'needs'. We have to 'balance' our needs and theirs, according to Brundtland: but any such

'balancing' process will always tend to disfavour the voiceless and formless. Whereas: we will and should if necessary even sacrifice⁴⁶ ourselves for them (no 'balancing' there), if we really care about them. Ideas such as love, care or sacrifice are alien to the Brundtland techno-utopian ambitions.⁴⁷

The foundational problem is this: 'sustainability' is a concept that from the very beginning was congenitally open to abuse. It is not some unlucky accident that it has been corrupted in its meaning. It was almost designed to be corruptible.⁴⁸

I would argue that there is a big difference between crucial concepts for a flourishing post-growth society such as 'democracy' on the one hand and 'sustainability' or 'sustainable development' on the other, in this connection. The founding idea of democracy is sound, it seems to me, in a way that the founding idea of sustainable development is not.⁴⁹ The founding genesis of sustainable development is (1) keeping something going, and (2)[this is the crucial bit] the thing that one is keeping going being something that *we* have supposedly already achieved. In other words, in a world where it is accepted wisdom to talk about 'developed' (What extraordinary hubris, to think that our country is 'developed'!) and 'developing' countries, the idea of 'development' is fundamentally flawed from the start, and dressing it up as 'sustainable' does not in the least repair that. It even makes it *worse* – because it gives the impression that that process (essentially, the process of industrialisation, growth etc) can be made to go on and on across ever more of the world!

To sum up the thoughts just offered: The concept of ‘development’ comes hereabouts from the idea that some countries are ‘developed’ and others are ‘developing’. This is an outdated and in fact appalling assumption. Moreover: it makes industrialisation the *telos* for the entire world. But what if the endless pursuit of industrialisation and growth is the problem rather than any part of the solution? What if we in fact need to learn from the remnants of the ‘undeveloped’ world how to live; what if our ‘anthropological’ assumptions need to be put in reverse, such that it is the ‘developed’ countries that need to change the most, and not the so-called ‘developing’ countries?

Of course, as I allowed above, it is in principle possible to go back further to first principles of what 'sustainable development' OUGHT to really mean, revising its meaning ‘behind’ even what Brundtland gave us - but this is much more difficult than in the case of 'democracy', because each of the words, 'sustainable' and 'development', and particularly the latter, are themselves, I have shown, problematic in a way that the words 'people' (*demos*) and 'rule/govern' (*cracy*) are not. The concept of *democracy* is fundamentally sound, whatever its abuses in the world today, in a way that is unclear for the concept of sustainability / sustainable development.

Similarly, I think a concept like ‘environmental citizenship’ (<http://www.cep.unt.edu/citizen.htm>) escapes many of the difficulties endemic to ‘sustainability’ and ‘sustainable development’. ‘Environmental citizenship’⁵⁰ is the idea that we are citizens not just of a nation-state, but also of a particular physical place – an environment - that

has an ungainsayable biophysical reality (and ultimately, we are citizens of the planet). The aim is to facilitate people thinking of themselves *not* (just) as consumers,⁵¹ but as citizens, by way of the nowadays comparatively novel method of ‘reconnecting’ themselves to the land, to the ecosystems on which they depend and which they are part of. Of enabling them, that is, to think of themselves not (just) as consumers, but as *conservers* of all this. Of moving from a primary self-identity as a ‘consumer’ to a primary self-identity as a ‘conservator’. Of us collectively moving, then, from ‘the consumer society’ to *the conservator society*.⁵² ‘Environmental citizenship’ is thus about taking on and self-identifying with a broader sense of responsibility, as a citizen, than is present in norms of voting for one’s self-interest, or even for the good of one’s (contemporary, human) community.

What we need to do, then, is to make such future-friendly one-planet living into common sense, ‘hegemonic’ (in Gramsci’s term) in a democracy. This involves the challenging task of steering people away from the currently dominant (profoundly hegemonic) self-image as consumers (for whom ‘freedom of choice’ is paramount) to a new self-image as conservators and as citizens.⁵³ This is absolutely crucial in turn to the functionality of democracy; for, without it, people will primarily take their role at the ballot-box etc. to be one merely complementing or serving their interest as present-minded / short-termist consumers. We ought to explore, and in fact to ‘recall’ and ‘revive’, *democracy* in the true sense of the word. Rule by THE PEOPLE must be among other things about ALLOWING people to understand how political debate is too-often

framed in order to manipulate them, and how they can escape that manipulation through self knowledge and mutual/collective organisation. We need to put further work into the finding of effective new linguistic ‘frames’ through which the idea of environmental/ecological/future-friendly citizenship – an idea which can seem almost old-fashioned in our somewhat apathetic ‘affluent society’, but is actually a vital component for a new common sense – can be made salient and foregrounded again, for our age. For instance, through encouraging people to see themselves as citizens not by virtue merely of being denizens of a state, but by virtue of being *inhabitants of a place*. We are citizens of our *locality*; of our *environment*,⁵⁴ ultimately, *of the Earth*. We need to relocate our *habits* – the ways we live – into the *habitats* that we *inhabit* (i.e. of which we are the *inhabitants*), if our ways of living are to be genuinely post-growthist, suitable for a (finite) planet... This paradigm-shift may be more possible now than it was before, now that people increasingly understand that there are limits to how much we can get away with polluting our environment, and increasingly identify themselves *both* with their locality (think for instance of Transition Towns) *and* as global citizens (or even ‘netizens’). The word ‘citizen’ is of course etymologically connected to the word ‘city’. In a highly and increasingly urbanized country and world, we badly need to

create cities that are in every sense green (as well as enabling people to return to the land, etc).⁵⁵ Ecological *citizenship* is thus essential. And one *key method of achieving positive green change*, then is to ‘recall’ the true meanings of crucial but misunderstood words, so long as those meanings are *worth* recalling... Thinking through what ‘the people’ really means requires one to think more about the future: because surely ‘the people’ doesn’t end only with those who can vote, or with those who are alive. A people exists *over time*. It includes those who are dead and those who are yet to be born.⁵⁶

Hopefully by now you are finding the ‘new’ common sense that is starting to be sketched here amenable. But I suspect that some readers will be finding that I am protesting too much. Do we really need to go as far as I am suggesting? The metaphor of ‘growth’ is in so many ways appealing: we like children to grow; we want our wisdom to grow... How can we be so sure that ‘green growth’ is not the answer? I think it is therefore worth rehearsing one more time just how and why. Only then will the post-growth common sense that I am seeking to ground be able to displace the hegemony of growthism without remainder.

However: Those already thoroughly convinced of the (oxy-)moronic character of ‘green-growthism’ may wish to skip the following section.

Why not just embrace 'green growth'?

Here's why:

1) More human activity (more economic activity, etc) is not a good thing. We are too busy as it is. Less human activity would be better in itself, even regardless of the ecological consequences of excess human activity. Yes, sure, let's have wiser human activity, but that will include: there being less of it. We should not be into human dreams that point in the opposite direction to this wisdom. Many human dreams have become thoroughly infected by materialism, myths of 'progress', etc. *Real progress* is something very different.

2) Unless you 'angelize' human economic activity (see Aubrey Meyer's and Herman Daly's work on why this will not happen), *eliminating* its environmental impact, which there is no reason to believe is possible, then increasing levels of it are incompatible with a finite planet. That means that eventually there are limits, like it or not, to how much we can do. The green-growthist suggestion is still therefore running the risk of being the same old Prometheanism in disguise.

3) There are no extant examples of economies reducing their footprints sufficiently to achieve one-planet living per capita levels, without actual reductions in levels of economic activity. (See Jonathon Porritt's book *Capitalism as if the world mattered* for a remarkably honest appraisal of the difficulty of finding any actual cases of 'absolute decoupling' of ecological footprint (starting with carbon footprint) from growth. Relative decoupling – e.g. lower 'carbon-intensity' of GDP is (relatively) easy to

achieve; absolute decoupling – e.g. increasing GDP while decreasing carbon emissions – is rare.)⁵⁷

4) *Even if* one can achieve some absolute decoupling, the killer blow against green-growthism is this: that there is good reason to believe that one cannot achieve enough of it to put us on a safe trajectory to avoid fatally breaching the Earth's limits to growth (starting with but again not restricted to: the risk of runaway climate change). Thus, following on from 2) and 3): As Peter Victor and (Green House Advisory Board member) Tim Jackson have shown,⁵⁸ the REDUCTIONS in footprint that we need in order to live as if we only had one planet are not compatible, according to our best models, with any net-economic-growth-paths *at all*. So if a proposed trajectory coincides with net economic growth, then it is not genuinely green. If/when someone says of economic growth/GDP, that if we chose to measure its progress [sic.], in a better/greener society/world, there's no reason to believe it wouldn't rise, then they are wrong.⁵⁹

The key – decisive – point made by Victor and Jackson in this connection is worth dwelling on longer. It is that, while it is in principle possible for an economy to exhibit growth overall while becoming greener overall, we have very good reason to believe, from even the most optimistic model, that it is *not* possible for this to happen *fast enough* for us to avoid breaching (and breaching worse than they are already breached, in the case of those planetary limits that we have already overshot) the planetary limits⁶⁰ which make the flourishing of human etc. life possible on our planet.

In sum: In theory, it is in principle possible for there to be green economic

growth across the entire economy, but, both in history and in modeling, and therefore *in practice*, it is *not* possible, except at best at levels that will still leave us massively overshooting the needful climate targets and other limits to growth (and thus *not* being genuinely green). While it is true to say that we want (e.g.) the renewables sector to grow, this is only tenable if other sectors (e.g. fossil fuels and nuclear) *shrink* – MORE. So this means: no *net* growth, and eventually (and ‘eventually’ now cannot be very long off!) degrowth. There are many things that cannot keep growing indefinitely on a finite planet (and in fact we are already bursting through the limits in a reckless way. On this, the Club of Rome reports from the first ‘Limits to growth’ report onward are essential reading.⁶¹ See also <http://www.stockholmresilience.org/...>⁶²). They include: land use, population levels, levels of ‘resource’ use, levels of pollution. These are the things which lead one, rightly, to say ‘we can’t have endless growth on a finite planet’, as a crude but defensible shorthand. Because these ARE the inevitable effects of net long-term economic growth. GDP is a nonsense,⁶³ but it is *correlated* with various hard truths. Let’s not pretend otherwise. It is folly, that is, to pretend that GDP going up is compatible with being green.⁶⁴

So, to those ‘greens’ who say that they don’t care whether or not GDP rises or falls, because it is a dumb measure, and that they are content to see ‘green growth’, we should reply: while this perhaps sounds good in theory, in the abstract, what Jackson et al have given us is good reason to believe that GDP-rise, on even the greenest of scenarios, is *incompatible* with a future where we do not keep bursting through planetary limits. Therefore you ought to care. For GDP-growth is correlated with

what we as greens are most concerned to avert.

Furthermore: a good green future will not be one in which we seek to have more ‘value’, as measured in monetary worth. It will be one in which there are more commons, in which there is more of a ‘provisioning’ economy: and that means that the monetary economy will shrink. A good green future is one in which commodification is reduced, not increased. So: yes to (e.g.) better and better poems. But no, to poems that cost more (or that are longer and longer ... Not all growth, even in relation to things we like, is good, not by any means!). No, in short, to a future with higher-GDP. Higher-GDP is correlated with the opposite of progress.

And furthermore: growthism is historically an ALTERNATIVE to serious distributionism. The dirty secret of growthism is that it is an excuse for not having to ask the rich to share. If the pie can keep getting bigger, then why worry too much about how it is distributed? But the pie can’t keep getting bigger: because the ingredients are running out... (This is a key reason why a green future is – must be - a more egalitarian future.) To repeat: while it *is* pointless to be interested in whether GDP rises or falls for its own sake, and GDP *is* a dumb ‘measure’, IT DOESN’T FOLLOW THAT if someone chose, out of interest, to measure its progress in a greener, better world, there’s no reason to believe it wouldn’t rise. There are *multiple* such reasons, that I’ve outlined above. And ergo, we can’t have endless growth in/on a finite planet.

Now, it might at this point be objected that it is possible for Britain to grow *its* economy, while contributing to a

greener planet *overall*.⁶⁵ I agree strongly that the exporting of so much of our manufacturing to China etc. has been an ecological etc. disaster.⁶⁶ (I in fact made this argument for example in evidence to the Energy and Climate Change Committee, not long ago.⁶⁷) In theory we could produce many more of our manufactured goods here and actually somewhat reduce ecological impacts/footprint (transport impacts, energy waste ('production' is often very energy-inefficient in China)). But the same logic applies as described above: if this were to happen, it would need to result in a commensurate or greater REDUCTION of levels of economic activity in China. (And that starts to sound like a recipe for making the world *more* unequal.) Otherwise we are / would be simply fuelling worldwide economic expansion, which is utterly untenable ecologically. That is to say that we should be talking about green protectionism as part of a Green New Deal approach that is NOT a 'green stimulus' approach.⁶⁸ Any industrial expansion must itself be genuinely green, as well as *replacing* 'grey' industry, somewhere in the world.

Moreover, if all that we do ever do is 'Site here to sell here' without questioning overall levels of consumption and 'production' (sic.: 'production' is a piece of 'unspeak': in reality, there is no wealth but *life*⁶⁹), then we are not questioning our obscene footprint in a serious way: we need a plan to reduce the latter to one-planet levels.⁷⁰ One-planet living must, non-negotiably, be the aim. Britain is currently in a 3-planet living condition.

It can feel difficult to say all of this, at a time of 'austerity'. But: Now is not the time to be faint of heart and back away from our philosophy. We can't

just go around pretending that everyone can have everything and that everything will be fine in the best of all possible worlds.⁷¹ If our children are to have a future, they need to inherit an economy which is not munching the ecology up at anything like the present rate.

My sense is that the public sense that they are not experiencing progress; they don't like the levels of air pollution they are experiencing, the levels of freight they see and hear around them; they know deep-down that anthropogenic climate change is real and that materialism and consumerism are not making them happy; they don't like their commutes, nor the diminution of green spaces; they don't like over-development, and the gradual destruction of all the beautiful places of our world. Thus one must be prepared to lead. To talk judiciously but also plainly about what will be required in order to save our common future – including the drastic reining in of economic production, and instead provisioning for a better *quality* of life, at levels that are compatible with a generalised 'contraction and convergence' style model.

To sum up what has been shown in this section:

In an era where it is clear that social and ecological limits to growth are being breached, the over-arching questions must now be: Can we *afford* more growth?; and: What is growth *for*? (And this question takes us back to the key insight of this report: that, rather than remaining stuck at the level of calling for 'green growth', or for 'the green economy' (ignoring issues of growth), or even for a radically transformed (a post-growth) economy, we must continually draw people's attention back to what an

economy is *for*. Which is: something other than the economy itself...)

We need well-being; we need income and jobs; we need economic stability; but, as Tim Jackson's epochal report '*Prosperity without growth*' has most clearly shown, *none of these things* require growth. Furthermore, growth is now in any case mostly uneconomic. As the leading ecological economist Herman Daly has put it: "Marginal costs of additional growth in rich countries, such as global warming, biodiversity loss and roadways choked with cars, now likely exceed marginal benefits of a little extra consumption. The end result is that promoting further economic growth makes us poorer, not richer." ⁷² In short: being pro-growth in the rich world today is at best being a sucker for the very rich: and probably bad for virtually *everyone*, just as inequality is (the two, in fact, are part of the same process...)

We need to ensure the stabilisation of our economy via a true 'Green New Deal', to prevent a Depression and to transform our industry in a greener direction. But we must *not* accept the idea that what is needed is a *resumption* of economic growth, nor accept the fantasy that what is needed is, in the real world, in practice, according to history, to philosophy, to our best models, *compatible* with net economic growth.

In the medium-longer term, one thing that is needed is to establish what a long-term viable level of material throughput in the economy would be, what it will take to achieve one-planet living (and with a suitable 'margin for error' – a suitably precautionary framework – built in).

Green House would like in the future to establish a Commission that would, with the aid of research commissioned

to this specific end, aim in turn to establish what level of material-throughput and roughly what level of economic activity is compatible with a long-term healthy ecosystem and with human well-being and flourishing, in the United Kingdom and beyond.⁷³

This Commission would ask the following questions:

What would a 'steady-state' economy really look like? What is the best possible life compatible with ecological limits?

How do we have workable public finances and low levels of unemployment in a no-growth economy?⁷⁴

How do we get there? (Including looking at examples: Japan, Kerala, Cuba, UK in WW2, Costa Rica, Bhutan...)

The current economic-and-financial crisis, which is taking place against the background of and may well have been accelerated by a slow-burning and massive ecological crisis,⁷⁵ is a unique opportunity to redirect our economy in a way that will be long-term viable and that will not harm the unborn future generations who are so completely dependent upon the decisions that we make now. For what does the economy 'grow' *into*, eat *into*, if not the ecosystem? We must not miss the opportunity, nor waste the multiple-current-crisis. This means that we must abandon our remaining attachment to growthism, of whatever hue.

'Growth' can be an appealing metaphor. But we don't want cancerous growth; we don't want waistline growth beyond a certain point; and most importantly we don't want endless growth in a hamster... If you've never seen this video, it may well be a better persuader than anything I've written in the last couple

of pages...

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bqz3R1NpXzM>

The hegemony of growth has to end. It has to be displaced. By the emergent post-growth common sense. Which is focused on us and our kin (our non-

human fellow beings) and our one and only planetary home, and not stuck within the blinkers of any economism, not even a radically improved form thereof, but rather treats the economy as means, not end.

Post-growth common sense

We can now start to draw together what we have learnt. We can start to see what the ruling metaphors - the metaphors we would actually be able to *live by*⁷⁶ - might be, in a post-growth world.

We should talk LESS about 'the economy'.⁷⁷ Such talk mostly just feeds into people's stereotypes of what an economy is. Fixating on economics simply reinforces belief in the importance of economics, of economies, of 'goods',⁷⁸ etc. (this is a Cromptonian point). We should talk more about the things that an economy is actually FOR: i.e. a better society, *quality of life*, etc. . Once one does THAT, and does it properly, then 'growth' drops away as irrelevant/counter-productive. So it's not about looking to how to communicate a post-growth ECONOMY. It's about how to communicate post-growthism in its actual meaning – which means not talking about growth, nor even about what kind of *economy* we want, mostly. The economy needs, as Polanyi articulated, to be RE-MEBEDDED within the deeper frames – society and ecology.

This may still sound very abstract. How would it look in practice / concretely-exemplified? Here are some suggestions on this front, suggestions towards the content of a post-growth common sense and how to frame it: In terms of what a *good* life, 'a better life' that is not a permanently-growthist life, and that builds in true respect for nature etc., the indigenous south American concept of 'Buen vivir' seems a very promising 'case-study'.⁷⁹

We need to build a sense of *enough*.⁸⁰ An end to the materialistic culture of *more*.

Crucial to this and to the points that follow is the central importance of equality/egalitarianism. As is now familiar to us all, from Wilkinson and Pickett's work, it is not the absolute nor even ultimately the relative level of wealth (produced by growth) that really matters, in the 'developed' (sic.) world today, for well-being on virtually every measure; it is how equal one's society is. Considerations of distributional equity, of genuinely *sharing*, trump economic considerations of allocation and of the size of the pie.

Thus: We need to talk more about SHARING. We all know that growthism is a SUBSTITUTE for real fairness, a more equal society, serious redistribution. (It is what 'socialists' turned to once they abandoned hope of achieving socialism.) Let's start saying so! Let's let go of 'trickle down' nonsense once and for all.

Common sense will in the future become *commons sense*. The concept of the commons⁸¹ is an ancient future that awaits us. It is what lies beyond the limits to growth. The quest for endless new frontiers to turn into 'resources' and commodities, the quest for speculative profit, the quest for accumulation: all of these can be turned back by a return to living on and in the commons. Large-scale private enclosures no longer make sense as a way to organize the world. The commons is the new frame that may well come to revive the public and the social. (It connects with sharing, of course, but is not identical to it: because the commons is a new (OLD) long-termist way of *doing* sharing.) The new common sense will be as much old and new, and nowhere more

clearly than in its appeal to those who Dade-Rose call ‘settlers’.⁸² Think thrift. Think repair. Think local. Think locality/place.

We should not go along with ‘It’s the economy stupid’; we should substitute ‘It’s the ecology, stupid’.

We should also drill down much more into the politics of personal and social life – what is it that the political world can do to improve family relationships, grow communities and friendship, and even address personal freedom and personal values. This is where the values agenda of Crompton et al is once more absolutely correct; it’s also where we ought to be talking more, once more, about some of the ideas that came from 70s and 80s feminism, the ‘the personal is political’ agenda. Let’s have more life out of work, more fulfilment within it, and let’s foster those personal and social values.

This connects with the hugely-important ‘well-being’ agenda of

Richard Layard, and (greener) of NEF: see

<http://www.neweconomics.org/issues/entry/well-being> . Less talk of ‘standard of living’, more talk of ‘quality of life’. A ‘post-materialist’ life. In this work, we can see how a better quality of life is perfectly compatible with, and in fact *probabilified* by, a post-growth mentality.

Part of this picture is: starting at last to move towards a leisure society.⁸³

Greens should be wary of putting all their eggs in boxes marked ‘jobs’; employment needs to be shared out, most of us need to work *less*, and in less alienated settings, and then we can start to live more, in ways that needn’t be commodified and designed to be purchased by time-poor people unable (as so many of us in Britain are) to see how to grow our own food, share collective meals, etc. etc.

And post-growth common sense will then have more space, literally, for space: for our green and pleasant land, for space to think and walk and be in...

Conclusion

The attentive reader will have gathered that we have come a long way since the task of this report was ‘appointed’. The idea that I began with, in this report, was of how one could best name and describe the post-growth economy. The idea that I have largely replaced that idea with is of how one should best name and describe the post-growth *society*, utterly nested in its ecology.

I have not sought to give a complete filling-out of that idea. I have suggested some possible specific frames, forms of words, ideas (and critiqued others). The most important thing I have done is, I think: offered a framework for the further deep reframing work that needs doing. The task of generating, realizing, and rendering potentially hegemonic a post-growth common sense will be a long one. It will require a lot of hard work, intellectual and otherwise. It will change according to circumstances; it is clearly easier to offer some frames to get us there than to guess the frames that would best keep us there.

But one thing is for sure. It is time for the world to *wake up*, and smell the post-growth coffee. We have very little time left, if we are not fatally to rupture the limits to growth. This is not even just a question of our children’s children any more, nor of wildlife, nor of aesthetics, vitally important though all of these are. It is not even a question of our children. For all of us except those who are definitely about to die, there is a dire threat now posed by the industrial-growth economy (a threat, in part, of perhaps bringing forward that time of death drastically for many of us). It is not sensible, let alone moral, to gamble with one’s future, let alone that of everybody else

including all our descendants, recklessly. Further growth is now reckless.

Some will complain that I am here ignoring the alleged key psychological finding in recent years re. greenery: that scaring people merely puts them off, and that we must only talk about what is good, fun, positive, etc. This is rubbish, a hopelessly-defeatist conclusion that emerges in part from a misapplication of New Age ‘positive thinking’. True, people badly need to be offered a positive vision: that is what the post-growth project is by and large all about, and what this report is by and large all about. But they also need truth: they don’t want politicians and intellectuals to spin them Pollyanna-ish nonsense, but rather to talk with them honestly (Honesty is a ‘commodity’ that has been in terribly short supply, in recent times...). We need to warn people (We need, as Churchill famously said, to raise the alarm, which is profoundly different from being ‘alarmist’) – and then offer a solution that actually rises to the challenge. That is what we are seeking to do. The reason why people usually feel merely discouraged / get prompted to denialism, etc., by environmental nightmare-ism, is that (as in nearly all fictive/dystopian presentations) no solution whatsoever is offered, or (as in liberal versions) only hopelessly inadequate solutions (viz.: individual actions, just changing your lightbulbs, etc.) are offered.⁸⁴ When there is an honest presentation of the threat, with bold hopeful solutions offered, communicated in a way that is actually effective and starts to instantiate a new common sense, then we can hope without hopelessness to be offering something that may as a package be effective, and not merely off-putting. Having the courage to name the nightmare that is coming if we don’t

together do enough to stop it is entirely compatible with – and probably a pre-condition for – having the will to realise the *dream* that our world could be, if only together we find a way to name it, and will it.

Green House's post-growth project has been a product of urgency, not of some vague intellectual curiosity or such. The need for a post-growth common sense is not supplementary: it is central, and urgent. And there is an audience for it. There are swathes of people in the green movement and far larger swathes beyond who feel, as we in Green

House do, that there must be a way of speaking inspirationally, and a way of being, that reveals in a meaningful way our care for future generations, for all our fellow beings, for a big change in our lifestyle, for a dream of a slower, quieter, happier, less risk-multiplying life. ...For us as a movement, and ultimately as a nation⁸⁵ and more to be calling for enough to be done such that human beings could actually flourish. And survive. Let us follow (and join together) the threads that are already available, that have been outlined above, in order to realize this dream that can crowd out the business-as-usual nightmare.

Recommendations

This report's central Recommendations have in effect already been given, in the 'Post-growth common sense' section, above. Let me add to those, by way of addition and recapitulation, only the following:

... When you say 'the economy' to people, because of received 'wisdom' (sic.), you prime them to think of economic growth, of material aspiration, and to think in ways that are largely *opposed* to thinking of (e.g.) environmental care.

Making 'the economy' central to our mission is priming values opposed to our values.

We need to transform the economy, and to talk about doing so: but the primary way to do that, I have suggested, is (ironically) precisely not by talking about 'the economy'. It is by talking about an actually-better *quality* of life: it is about

talking about what an economy is FOR rather than talking about 'the economy'. It is also about placing ecological limits up front: and about *the beautiful coincidence* between the need to reduce material throughput, the ending of growth, redistribution making us all happier, localization, and better quality of life being aimed at rather than quantity of stuff. All these agendas largely coincide in terms of their policy-prescriptions and in terms of what values and frames they suggest.

This report is a beginning, nothing more. It is a call, with some working-out, for us to find, together, the language of inspiration and of good sense that helps make sense to the world out of the common good that we share. Of the shared project of sharing and more, that could yet see the post-growth world as a place that is good, rather than terrifying and depressing, to live in. My final recommendation is: contribute to taking up this work, yourself. In the way *you* speak and write; and in what *you* seek to investigate or do.

Endnotes

¹ Big thanks also, for help with this report, particularly to Brian Heatley, Anne Chapman, George Graham, Ray Cunningham and (particularly!) to Tom Crompton, who provided extremely helpful comments on earlier drafts. (Thanks also, for conversations and work that fed into this report, to Phil Hutchinson, Michael Loughlin, and Andy Pearmain.)

² Part of the benefit of a post-growth society will be that there will be less time-stress. One of its big attractions, then, is the promise of a slower, less stressy, saner life... This needs stressing (sic.) in our comms efforts with regard to what is to be gained from the transition to a post-growth future...

³ Those unconvinced of this may wish to fast-forward-wind to the section below entitled “Why not just embrace ‘green growth’?”

⁴ See <http://www.global-briefing.org/2012/07/the-steady-state-economy-life-after-growth/>. One might speak also of a ‘climax economics’.

⁵ http://www.greenhousethinktank.org/files/greenhouse/home/1Post_growth_inside.pdf. If you haven’t read this, doing so is recommended, as a way into the project which the present report is rounding out.

⁶ We might think of such a framing as positing not just a dynamic economic equilibrium, but of being in dynamic equilibrium with the biosphere.

⁷ This is the basis of my reading of the ‘Green New Deal’; as a transitional policy designed to reboot the economy for a green future, while preventing an uncontrolled depression now (caused by the so-called economic crisis) or later (caused by some ecological/societal collapse). The Green New Deal, if intended in this way and *not* as a Keynesian ‘green stimulus’ (see Molly Scott Cato’s report thereon as part of the post-growth project:

http://www.greenhousethinktank.org/files/greenhouse/home/Green_Keynesianism.pdf), places us properly to start – once the populace have accepted that growth is not possible, not necessary, and not desirable, once they see the viability of a ‘steady-state’ economy (i.e. of a Green-New-Deal-stabilised economy) – to build down the level of economic activity so as to reduce the level of material throughput etc to live within our planetary boundaries.

See <http://brightgreenscotland.org/index.php/2011/10/plan-b-vs-plan-c/> & my articles here: www.gci.org.uk/Documents/COM_Good_Society_Green_Society_04.pdf, for more detail on all of this.

⁸ For my profound scepticism concerning these, see e.g. <http://blog.talkingphilosophy.com/?p=6884> & <http://blog.talkingphilosophy.com/?p=4367>, and my books on the topic referred to therein.

⁹ It is intriguing and ironic that I am able to make this criticism of Common Cause: for the opposite criticism is made by Rose: that too much in the way of leadership is offered by the Common Cause approach, which therefore is allegedly restricted in its appeal to ‘pioneers’ (See http://www.campaignstrategy.org/articles/time_for_strategy.pdf; Rose suggests here that his and Dade’s approach here is not correctly understood strictly speaking as a social marketing approach, but is for sure a marketing approach, and that Crompton errs in seeking to leave behind marketing altogether in the name of values-based-leadership. Cf. my <http://greenwordsworkshop.org/node/12> on what is fundamentally problematic about marketing. See also n.12, below.)

¹⁰ <http://www.campaignstrategy.org/articles/usingvaluemodes.pdf>. There has been much (often bad-tempered) argument between the Dade-Rose approach and the Crompton approach. My sympathies are in the end more with the latter than the former, if and when they actually clash. However, I don’t think that the Cromptonian Common Cause approach does itself any favours by claiming that it can be proven through ‘psychological science’ that it is valid and that the Dade-Rose Values Modes approach is not (cf. <http://valuesandframes.org/value-modes-and-common-cause-response-to-rose/>). For I think that the dispute is in significant part a matter of what is politically and philosophically possible – and we do not know and *cannot* (in advance of history) know the answer to that question.

Moreover, I think that the Rose vs. Crompton antagonism can be to some extent *overcome*. I think that common cause (!) can be found among reframing-minded environmentalists. It will require some give



and take on both sides (which hasn't been hugely in evidence yet! ;-). It will require some instantiation of values/practices of altruism, good listening etc IN the dispute itself. It will require both sides acknowledging first the simple point that the Rose approach is likely to be more short-term effective, the Crompton approach more likely to be long-term effective. And it will require looking at cases to see whether there are (as I suspect there are) grounds for a 'horses-for-courses' approach.

Here is an example (of where Cromptonian purism may err and Dade-Rose have by contrast something to tell us): It is true that if I start recycling just because it is 'cool', then I am likely to do other 'cool' things too (such as buying high-carbon new products), and this is the helpful warning that the 'Common Cause' approach issues against 'social marketing' approaches, however 'green' they may be...BUT the simple fact that I find myself recycling may open me to things I hadn't anticipated: such as the satisfaction of actually taking some power over my waste. This was very much my experience with becoming a vegetarian. I became a vegetarian because I became convinced of it for a very specific reason (to do with how vegetarianism can potentially help prevent famine, through facilitating the growing of more food in smaller areas of land / of the globe). But once I started BEING a vegetarian, I found that my whole life changed. My new habits, the way it made me different from others, paying more attention to what entered my mouth, thinking about animals no longer as food - it caused a slow revolution that shifted and activated other values. Such that I ended up after a couple of years an animal-rights campaigner, etc. .

Tom Crompton points out, in response to this (private correspondence), that the *reasons* I went vegetarian are important to a greater extent than can be understood on the Dade-Rose model. I went vegetarian because I was concerned about social injustice. Cromptonian values work (see e.g. his and John Thogersen's "Simple and painless: The limitations of spillover in environmental campaigning", *J. Consum. Policy* (2009) 32 141-163) would predict that this may well generalise to other related concerns. What would have happened if I had gone veggie to save money? Crompton would suggest that *possibly* this would have generalised to other pro-social and pro-environmental concerns – but probably only if the links were made for me. Probably more likely is that my behaviour would then have generalised to other money-saving measures which may – or may not – have been pro-environmental.

I think that this response is partly convincing, but only partly. To continue with the same example from my own case: I also found that going vegetarian activated health concerns for me around meat: but these had *nothing whatsoever* to do with the reason that I first went veggie.

¹¹ Now, of course, Common Cause explicitly recognises the need for such leadership at a number of points. But: The danger remains that the circumplex can appear to trap us in an alleged psychological reality that appears to make leadership, winning, and achievement impossible for those who wish to remain ethical. Whereas the truth is this (and this is where politics and philosophy trump Psychology): Psychology as a 'science' risks seeming to limit us into what has been the case in the past. But the future is open: we make the future together. We make social reality, and continually remake it. It is not set in stone for us by any alleged psychological 'results'. (Indeed, we can even deliberately set our face against such 'results', and change ourselves accordingly.)

Thus in practice there may be a grave danger in the Common Cause approach of delegitimizing leadership (which is sometimes assumed to be tied *inevitably* to egoistic attitudes), thus ensuring that we never actually WIN. (This can risk fatally undermining the viability/appeal of a Common Cause approach to those active in electoral politics.)

¹² Thus the Schwartzian circumplex risks one's approach being too *conservative*. Green reframers are interested in radical and even revolutionary change to our society. That change will necessarily involve people dramatically stepping into leadership roles, and changing the world. It will involve 'power' and 'achievement'. Saying things that simply make it sound as if that is incompatible with being good risks standing directly in the way of what needs doing.

The irony here then is, once more, that, far from being too radical, as Dade-Rose take the Crompton approach of providing 'signposts' to be (cf.

www.assets.wwf.org.uk/downloads/weathercocks_report2.pdf), the latter risks still being too conservative (cf. n.9, above). Supplying insufficient leadership. Remaining in hock to existing values modes, and to the 'wisdom' of focus groups, which merely telescope existing common sense, rather than offering a path to a new common sense.



The way out of this is for the Common Cause approach to make plain that the circumplex is not immutable. This requires giving up the alleged permanent foundation in scientific psychology for the validity of Common Cause.

¹³ For detailed argumentation toward this conclusion, see my books *There is no such thing as a social science* (co-authored with Phil Hutchinson and Wes Sharock) and *Wittgenstein among the sciences*. See also <http://blog.talkingphilosophy.com/?p=6884> (and <http://storify.com/NeuroWhoa/psychology-as-science>).

¹⁴ This and the following paragraphs are strongly influenced by correspondence with Tom Crompton, whose help again I want to stress here.

¹⁵ Those societies – a tiny minority of the societies that have existed in all of human existence – helpfully called ‘WEIRD’ by Jared Diamond: Western, Educated, Industrial, Rich, Democratic (sic.): http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/non_fictionreviews/9756597/The-World-Until-Yesterday-by-Jared-Diamond-review.html

¹⁶ See my www.leaveourkidsalone.org

¹⁷ This is one reason why we formed Green House.

¹⁸ See n.13 above. Cf. also <http://blog.talkingphilosophy.com/?p=3398> & <http://blog.talkingphilosophy.com/?p=5837> & <http://blog.talkingphilosophy.com/?p=4367>

¹⁹ See his GH report http://www.greenhousethinktank.org/files/greenhouse/private/Sustainability_Citizenship_inside.pdf. (See the section below on ‘Sustainability?’, for why I would much prefer a term like ‘ecological citizenship’ or ‘green citizenship’ or ‘future-friendly citizenship’.)

²⁰ See www.greenwordsworkshop.org for more detail.

²¹ Once more: Focus groups will interpret things according to today’s common sense – they need tell us nothing about how that common sense is shaped and changed.

²² The ideology needed for our time is, I would claim, a radically-conservative and seriously-egalitarian ecologism: see my <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/archives/34514>. But I shall not rely on this claim, here. (Those interested in the claim should also check out my recent ECOLOGIST piece on ecologism vs. growthism: http://www.theecologist.org/blogs_and_comments/commentators/2327816/challenging_growthism.html.)

²³ Though it might. A new democratic revolution. (See e.g. David Graeber’s recent work.)

²⁴ One can get a sense of what such conceptual rupture means most profoundly perhaps from the work of Thomas Kuhn – see my book *Kuhn* (Oxford: Polity, 2002; co-authored with Wes Sharrock).

²⁵ This is, or ought to be, the *point* of talking about signposts rather than weathercocks (see http://www.wwf.org.uk/wwf_articles.cfm?unewsid=2224). This ought to be *clear* to those impressed by the Cromptonian critique of Dade-Rose. This is the meaning of *leadership*. (Cf. on this point also n.12, above.)

²⁶ In very roughly the sense that Lakoff’s most important contribution in my view is laying out a kind of a model that others can creatively follow for *how* to reframe so as to turn the rhetorical tables on the conventional wisdom. (Though of course Lakoff unfortunately never goes so far as to fundamentally question the frame of ‘growth’ for the economy. That is part of what is uniquely our task, here.)

²⁷ Though in another sense I shall raise profound questions about it, shortly.

²⁸ Working along with Matt Wootton, and with Green House colleagues.

²⁹ See on this Herman Daly’s work; including his work promoting the concept of ‘uneconomic growth’, which in his view is now most growth that there is. Growth that diminishes quality of life: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uneconomic_growth

³⁰ This is essentially the result of neoliberalism’s hegemony. (Cf. n.33, below.)

³¹ On this, see my <http://www.inderscience.com/info/inarticle.php?artid=13062> / https://www.academia.edu/207600/Economics_is_philosophy. See also my forthcoming work critiquing the Costanzian project of assessing the alleged monetary value of the ecosphere, including a paper co-authored with Molly Scott Cato on “The natural-capital controversy”.

³² See n.7, above. See also <http://rupertsread.blogspot.co.uk/2011/10/plan-b-vs-plan-c.html>



³³ The original analysis of this phenomenon was of course brilliantly essayed by Karl Polanyi (himself creatively radically reworking some ideas in Marx or Marxism) in his *The great transformation*. Polanyi held that Marx was wrong to say that the social relations in the economy always defined society more generally, but that under capitalism in particular the economy does do so, while earlier the economy was embedded in a wider set of social ideas. A key point of the present report is to seize on this Polanyian logic, and to suggest that Marxism and Capitalism itself (including Neoliberalism) alike are economic, and that greens should not be.

³⁴ This fits with Lakoff's dictum not to seek to win political/rhetorical battles on the enemy's territory, but always to reframe. That is a key source for my conception of a deep reframing, which is Green House's mission.

³⁵ Arguably, the Green Party has always had this right. Thus its fundamental document is entitled, 'Programme for a sustainable society' (Though I shall raise some concerns about the concept of 'sustainability', below), and it begins, unlike other such Party documents (insofar as they exist at all) with a 'Philosophical basis' statement.

³⁶ Though we should *not* be above looking to indigenous including quite literally stone-age cultures for powerful alternative ideas to our own as to how to structure a society. To refuse so to look *is to be a racist*. It is racism pure and simple to sneer automatically at stone-age cultures, as if all they were/are is 'primitive' versions of ourselves, with nothing to teach us.

That such cultures have much to teach us is evident from the work of Marshall Sahlins and of Kent Flannery and Joyce Marcus on the admirable egalitarianism of most of the societies that preceded ours, and from Jared Diamond's *The world since yesterday*, which details a number of regards in which we should consider learning from and adopting to some degree institutions of the original societies of our planet. (See also the conception of 'reverse anthropology' – learning from those one is sent to 'study' / watch' – implicit in *Avatar*: as my piece at p.35f. of *Radical Anthropology* 4, here, makes clear: http://www.radicalanthropologygroup.org/old/journal_04.pdf).

³⁷ This report is not the place for a detailed examination of the nature of well-being, though I offer some indications about this in the section on 'Post-growth common sense', below. The best place to look to start to get clear about what well-being involves in societies anything like our's in concrete detail is at the vital work of NEF on this. See <http://www.neweconomics.org/issues/entry/well-being>

³⁸ The flourishing of other species is required for this, of course; we may well (in my opinion, certainly should) furthermore add the flourishing of non-human animals as a related but *independently*-worthwhile goal.

³⁹ Contemporary versions include 'virtue ethics' and the important work of Alasdair MacIntyre.

⁴⁰ A premise beautifully encapsulated in the recent very-popular film, *Gravity*. See my <http://thinkingfilmcollective.blogspot.co.uk/2014/01/gravitys-pull.html>

⁴¹ As stressed by Confucius (see the opening of Steven Poole's important book, *Unspeaking*), a reframing project is worth nothing if it doesn't give us true names, if it doesn't return us to our language as a vehicle for honest communication (This is how we can differentiate my project from that of my old friend and adversary, the Republican Party's master rhetorical strategist and pollster, Frank Luntz: Cf. his work as exposed at <http://www.politicalstrategy.org/archives/001118.php>).

⁴² Among them, my Green House colleague Ray Cunningham – see his www.greenhousethinktank.org/files/greenhouse/admin/-2.pdf.

⁴³ For a detailed treatment, see John Foster's important book, *The sustainability delusion*.

⁴⁴ For support for this radical-sounding claim, see e.g. Debal Deb's *Developmentality*. See also Larry Lohman's work, and that of his colleagues at the CornerHouse.

⁴⁵ I use the term 'liberal(ism)' in this report in its proper philosophical/ideological sense, not in the sense that it is used by many good-hearted people in Britain and (especially) America to describe their politics. Cf. Lakoff's account in his *Moral politics* of why he is not a (Rawlsian) liberal. See also my work critiquing Rawls: see e.g. <http://blog.talkingphilosophy.com/?p=4405> & <http://blog.talkingphilosophy.com/?p=3100>, as starting-points.



⁴⁶ Though we don't as a rule need to use the language of 'sacrifice', at all: because it is not actually a *sacrifice* to do the right thing, to live decently, to care adequately (collectively) for our descendants, etc.; and it is certainly not a *sacrifice* either to achieve a better, slower, 'richer', more secure (etc) quality of life. Abandoning uneconomic growth, and indeed growthism in general, need be no sacrifice. One-planet-living will require lower material throughput. We'll then be living with less stuff. Less plastic toys that become junk almost immediately, etc. etc. . . Is that really such a hard message to 'sell'?

⁴⁷ There is of course still room for and perhaps need for some growth (development) in some parts of the 3rd world, such as parts of Africa, but this is obviously NOT an argument for development / green growthism in general.

⁴⁸ For a much more detailed version of this thought, goto <http://www.greenwordsworkshop.org/node/30> and listen to my talk on the topic, there. Part of my worry can be expressed polemically in this way: that 'sustainable development', like Rawls's excuse for inequality, is designed for liberals to feel good about themselves while they avoid having to make the profound changes to the world necessary for human survival and flourishing, but challenging to those liberals' position of class-privilege. (As Stokely Carmichael held: The liberal 'wants' to reform the world and make it better - so long as such reforms do not contain any risk of resulting in any diminution of his own status...)

⁴⁹ Moreover, the great thing about the word 'democratic' is that it 'says' what it means (etymologically: the people rule) and thereby is endlessly available for and assisting in its own reclamation. That is why abuses of it are easier to expose than abuses of 'sustainable'. People simply laugh when the GDR is (was) called genuinely democratic. Sadly, they don't often laugh when (e.g.) the government says that all development is now sustainable.

⁵⁰ I'd prefer 'ecological citizenship': as implied above, the term 'environment' is itself a term that needs replacing/reframing. See on this also <http://www.greenwordsworkshop.org/node/46> & <http://www.greenwordsworkshop.org/node/9>, and Chapter 1 of my book *Philosophy for life*.

⁵¹ Thinking of oneself as a consumer is *becoming* the ultimate ad-man's product. See <http://www.betternation.org/2011/09/producerism/>. Cf also Zygmunt Bauman's work in recent years.

⁵² Cf. Ted Trainer's work. (See also Sachs's masterful edited work, *The development dictionary*.)

⁵³ On this, see my <http://rupertsread.blogspot.co.uk/2011/09/its-producerism-stupid.html>

⁵⁴ The concept of 'bioregion' may be(-come) key here: see Alex Warleigh-Lack's Green House report on a Europe of the bioregions, and Molly Scott Cato's *The bioregional economy*.

⁵⁵ See David Nicholson Lord, *Green Cities And Why We Need Them*.

⁵⁶ On which Burkean note, see my 1st Green House report, http://www.greenhousethinktank.org/files/greenhouse/home/Guardians_inside_final.pdf

⁵⁷ For a post-growth critique of GDP itself, see my <http://shiftinggrounds.org/2014/03/progress-beyond-the-growth-fetish/>

⁵⁸ See Jackson's <http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/publications.php?id=914>; his Jackson, T 2012 **Let's be less productive** In: *The New York Times*, 27 May 2012, p SR4; his Jackson, T. 2011 "Societal transformations for a sustainable economy" *Natural Resources Forum* 35: 155-164; and Victor's 2012 P. Victor, "Growth, Degrowth and Climate Change: A Scenario Analysis", *Ecological Economics* 84, 206-212. Cf. also Victor, P and T Jackson 2012 "A commentary on the UNEP green economy scenarios" *Ecological Economics* 77:11-15; and <http://www.readcube.com/articles/10.1038/472295a>. What Jackson and Victor are saying, ever so gently and thoroughly, here, is that the idea of 'green growth' is incompatible with not breaching planetary limits.

⁵⁹ Cf. on this also the Tyndall Centre's Prof. Kevin Anderson: See <http://www.tyndall.ac.uk/node/1854>

⁶⁰ On which, see <http://www.stockholmresilience.org/21/research/research-programmes/planetary-boundaries.html>.

⁶¹ Cf. also <http://rupertsread.blogspot.co.uk/2012/05/greenparty-case-for-challenging.html> & <http://www.cambridgegreens.org.uk/economics/economics-conference-videos.html#Read>



⁶² See [The nine planetary boundaries - Stockholm Resilience Centre](http://www.stockholmresilience.org) www.stockholmresilience.org . For more detail, go also to <http://www.greenhousethinktank.org/page.php...> & <http://www.greenhousethinktank.org/...> . Cf also <http://www.ihdp.unu.edu/.../read/it-s-not-easy-being-green-1> & [FCRN | Paper: critique of 'green growth'](#)

⁶³ It is well-known that GDP is a hopeless measure (see n.57, above). See <http://www.nature.com/news/development-time-to-leave-gdp-behind-1.14499> . See also UNECE 2009: "It is simply not possible to justify selection of any indicator based on GDP as a sustainable development indicator..." UNECE (2009). "Measuring sustainable development: Report of the Joint UNECE/OECD/Eurostat Working Group on Statistics for Sustainable Development." <http://www.cbs.nl/.../0E68A254-32DB-450C-BA47.../0/UN> . Perhaps most definitively, see <http://www.zedbooks.co.uk/node/16853> . But my point is that this fact must not be used as an excuse for going soft on critiquing economic growth!

⁶⁴ We should beware of 'shifting baseline syndrome' (see Monbiot's recent book, *FERAL*). So much was already destroyed or damaged before we were born that we think a planet that has been radically dewilded and converted in large part to a human playground to be somehow normal and possible. It isn't. We need to raise our horizons, a lot. We need a kind of positive visioning/dreaming that will really make space for non-human animals, for wild ecosystems that can flourish and that don't require constant 'management', for eons of time for future people who need to be allowed access to a world that isn't full. I think we should dream slightly less of ourselves, and a lot more of what we can leave room for, in space and time, if we are big enough to accept that growth IS at an end, and that it is not possible, desirable still less humanly necessary for it to continue.

⁶⁵ Thanks to Maya De Souza for helpful discussion of this matter.

⁶⁶ And that this is one among various reasons why we need a green protectionist policy ['Site here to sell here', etc], as argued brilliantly in Woodin and Lucas's book, *Green alternatives to globalization*.

⁶⁷ See: <http://rupertsread.blogspot.co.uk/2011/12/embodied-emissions-my-evidence-to.html>

⁶⁸ For detailed argument, see my: <http://rupertsread.blogspot.co.uk/2011/10/plan-b-vs-plan-c.html> .

⁶⁹ Cf. <http://greenwordshop.org/node/36> . In the end, we need to plough over the entire field of language, and repeatedly, to keep turning our words and concepts away from the old hegemonic 'common sense', that endlessly recaptures us and endlessly needs reworking/replacing... Another deep example, beyond my scope here, is Heidegger's helpful and deeply-challenging questioning of frames such as 'natural resources', as themselves problematically anthropocentric and technocentric.

⁷⁰ To be clear then: in principle I quite agree that there is a case for some areas of manufacturing to increase in this country. In particular, we need an expansion specifically of green business/investment in our country: that's the Green New Deal. But the corollary, if the Green New Deal is actually to be green, is that this must be accompanied by substantial REDUCTIONS in the rest of the economy. I.e. We need to close down a very substantial chunk of the real (the 'grey') economy; over time, this will require a building down (carefully executed, to avoid an uncontrolled depression) of the levels of economic activity (much of which is just making people miserable and ill in any case) here. See <http://rupertsread.blogspot.co.uk/2012/05/greenparty-case-for-challenging.html>

⁷¹ Cf. <http://enoerew.blogspot.co.uk/2012/08/growth-fetish-by-clive-hamilton.html>

⁷² https://www.adbusters.org/magazine/81/the_crisis.html

⁷³ This is, that is, suggested as a key potential *follow-up* project to our extant post-growth project.

⁷⁴ Of course, a significant start has been made in this direction by our GH report, http://www.greenhousethinktank.org/files/greenhouse/home/Public_Services_inside_final.pdf

⁷⁵ See on this for instance Saral Sarkar's interesting though controversial recent work.

⁷⁶ As Wiliam Ophuls puts it, at p.136 of his *Plato's Revenge*: "The sages, prophets, poets and philosophers who have gone against the grain of civilisation by urging men and women to pursue wisdom and virtue instead of wealth and power have generally agreed on the means necessary to this end. They all envisioned a way of living that is materially and institutionally simple but culturally and spiritually rich – and therefore more generally free, egalitarian, and fraternal than life in complex societies devoted to continuous accumulation and expansion."

⁷⁷ This is of course NOT to derogate the vital work of my Green House colleagues Brian Heatley, Molly Scott Cato, etc.! Their work is vital because it rebuts the (dreadful) hegemony / status quo in



economics. But: in wider public-facing work, we should shy away quite deliberately from putting too many eggs in the economics basket. And rather draw people's attention to what an economy is nested in, and what (if anything does) gives it *point*.

⁷⁸ On the crucial import of reframing "goods", see my <http://www.greenwordsworkshop.org/node/18>.

⁷⁹ See the first epigraph to this report.

⁸⁰ The Maslowian 'satiation' idea in the values mode approach purveyed by Common Cause is very dubious - consumer-'needs' are never satiable. This is a feature of the Common Cause approach to values that is still therefore too open to growthism, and not attuned enough to the need to engender and contribute to a new common sense (which would also be the old common sense of wartime and postwar Britain, etc etc) of 'enoughism'. (For more on 'enoughism', see this important new book from CASSE: *Enough is Enough* (http://www.amazon.co.uk/Enough-Building-Sustainable-Economy-Resources/dp/0415820952/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1392228404&sr=1-1&keywords=enough+is+enough).

⁸¹ Understood of course after the fashion of Ostrom, rather than of Hardin! The latter's 'commons' was simply an open-access unfettered property regime. (For more on the commons properly-understood in relation to growthism, see my <http://shiftinggrounds.org/2014/03/progress-beyond-the-growth-fetish/>.)

⁸² Thus Andy Pearmain's interesting and non-oxymoronic call for 'progressive austerity':

http://www.greenhousethinktank.org/files/greenhouse/admin/1GGH1_Progressive_Austerity.pdf

⁸³ The ideas of Gorz and Illich are as pertinent as ever, in this connection.

⁸⁴ Here, the following remark of Thogersen and Crompton (*op.cit.*, p.152) is hugely helpful: "It is possible that campaigns, which emphasize the value of small and objectively insignificant private-sphere behavioural changes, will serve to harden the perception that the proper response to environmental changes is to rely entirely upon the choices that individuals make, working with their self-interest (their financial interest or their freedom of choice as consumers, for example)."

Individualism, the political philosophy of liberalism, is the problem, not the solution. The new common sense needs to be *political (and thus social)*, not economic.

⁸⁵ For after all, we are the nation that started the trouble off: by launching the Industrial Revolution.