

# Vulnerability and Resilience in Contemporary Green Thought and Action

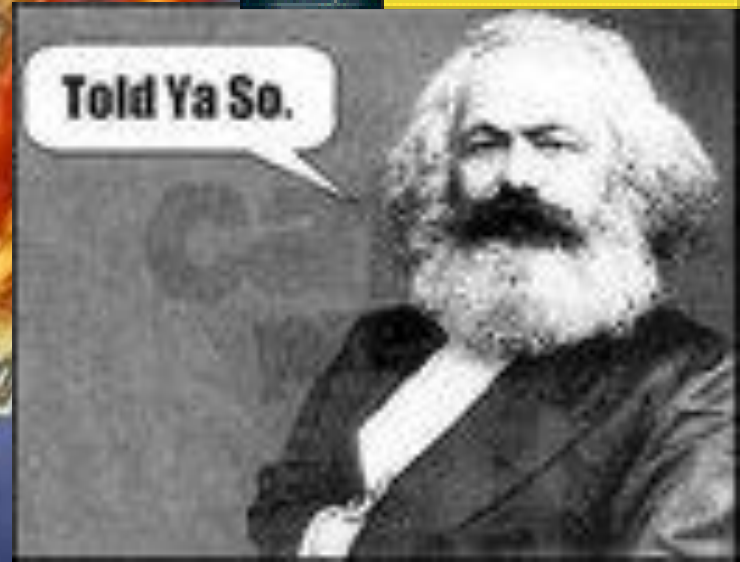
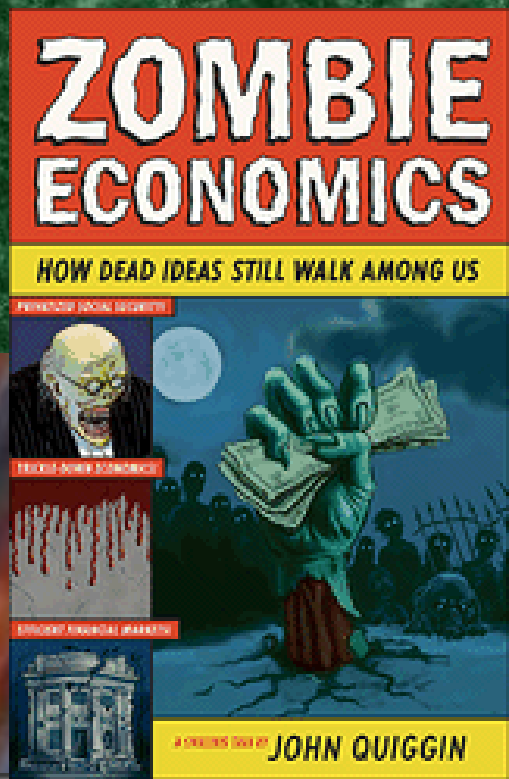
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# Context







'TRASH'

# Enjoy Climate Change

Coke's use of HFCs to cool its drinks contributes to climate change. Ban HFCs. [www.coke-spotlight.org](http://www.coke-spotlight.org)



# Background to this presentation

Based on a forthcoming book

***The Politics of Actually Existing***

***Unsustainability: Human Flourishing in a  
Climate Changed, Carbon Constrained World***  
(Oxford University Press)

And my own activism....Green Party, Hollywood  
Transition Town, work with Irish Congress of  
Trades Unions (new think tank – Centre for  
Progressive Economics)



Mainstream economists vs Mother Earth



# Vulnerability I: Ethics

Recognition of dependency and interdependency rather than the dangerous and false myth of independence of humanity from nature or from one another and equally dangerous myth of control

Recognition of contingency, dependency, limits, precaution

NOT a celebration of vulnerability but acknowledgement of it as constitutive of what it means to be human and an ineliminable aspect of the 'human condition'

Importance of thinking in terms of 'coping mechanisms' rather than 'solutions'

Rethinking our measure of progress – how we look after, regard and care for the most vulnerable in society not the size of our economy or strength of our army

# Vulnerability II: Political Economy

What would a political economy that took vulnerability, dependency and interdependency look like?

‘We are each others keeper’

In a closed, interconnected, globalised and globalising world the condition for my/our security is the securing of your/their conditions of security – the other as co-dependent

Reclaiming ‘security’ from its militaristic and jingoistic articulations

Discourse of human/social/economic/community security as empowering and attractive in time of crisis

Vulnerability and dependence comes in all forms.....







WE   
**Mobilize** OUR FORCES  
IN THE PERSIAN   
EVIL DOERS WILL NOT  
BE **EX**ONERATED  
FOR THEIR ACTIONS.  
THE UNITED STATES WILL  
ALWAYS  PREPARED  
TO PROTECT OUR...

Huck



**THE MORE GAS  
YOUR SUV USES**

**THE MORE FOREIGNERS  
I HAVE TO KILL!**

**NOW DO YOU GET IT?**

Safer, more peaceful  
world is a post-carbon  
one

Local, renewable energy  
sources as post-carbon  
geopolitics of  
competition, war and  
dependency on non-  
domestic energy



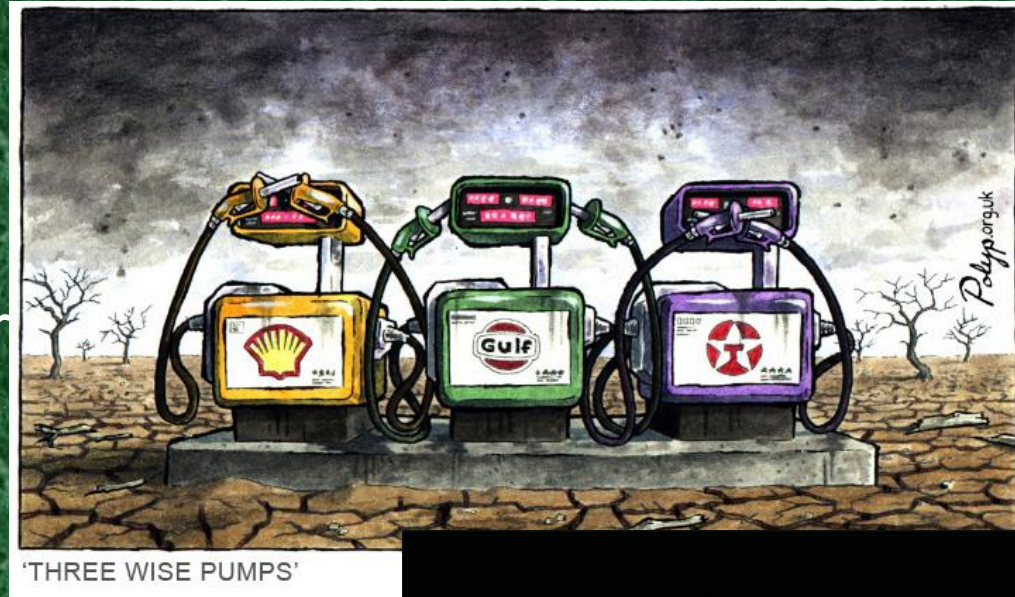
Pop a pill for every ill...



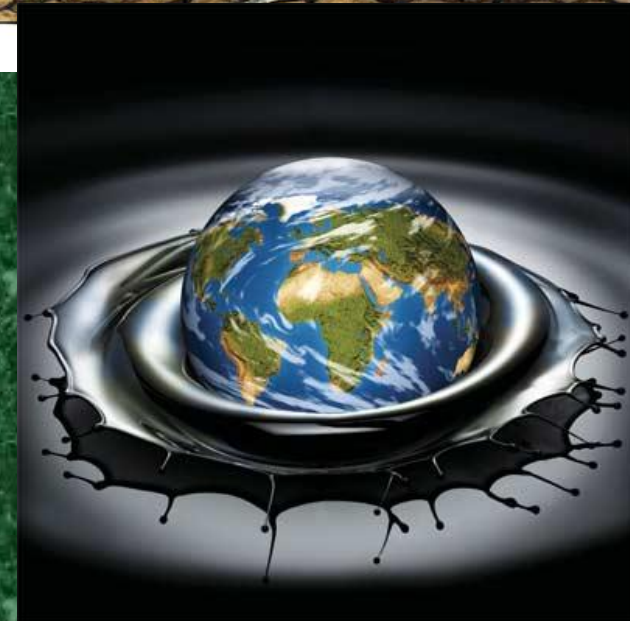


# Resource Limits – Peak Oil

Dependence on oil –  
name one thing in this  
room not made or  
transported in whole or  
part without oil?



‘We need to leave oil  
before oil leaves us’,  
Fathid Biriol, Chief  
Economist,  
International Energy  
Agency



# Resilience

Ability to withstand external and internal shocks

Need for communities and societies to develop 'coping mechanisms' to our unsustainability challenges

There is no 'once and for all solution' to our relationship with nature- always provisional, dynamic and to be re-negotiated

Dangers of a 'techno-fix' view

Danger of a conservative /return to the status quo ante

- 1) mirage of control and 'problem-solution' thinking when the real issue is to develop and deploy 'coping mechanisms'
- 2) Circumvents claims of justice – by focusing on supply-side solutions to allow 'business as usual' with its exiting social injustices



# Resilience, Social innovation and (Re)Learning

No automatic 'sustainability' between humanity  
and nature

No one size fits all solution

Sustainability will be different in Bangor Wales,  
than Bangor, Northern Ireland

Dynamism, innovative thinking, experiments in  
new forms of production, consumption, ways  
of life, ways of making our way in the world  
needed

Centrality of community-based and creative  
responses – towards 'resilient communities'



Three concepts - resilience, sustainability and collapse

Three approaches - Permaculture, Transition Towns movement,  
Peak Oil

Living and thinking with the possibility of collapse

The rise /re-emergence of 'hard green' thinking

The necessity of interdisciplinary thinking

Hope and 'mission-led' academic research

Action research and academic knowledge at the service of the  
community

# Context: “...our economy is killing the Earth”

*New Scientist*, 16 October 2008

“This is the logic of free-market capitalism: the economy must grow continuously or face an unpalatable collapse. With the environmental situation reaching crisis point, however, it is time to stop pretending that mindlessly chasing economic growth is compatible with sustainability. *Figuring out an alternative to this doomed model is now a priority.*”

*‘Why politicians dare not limit economic growth’* Tim Jackson, pp. 42-3.







'STEADY AS SHE GOES'



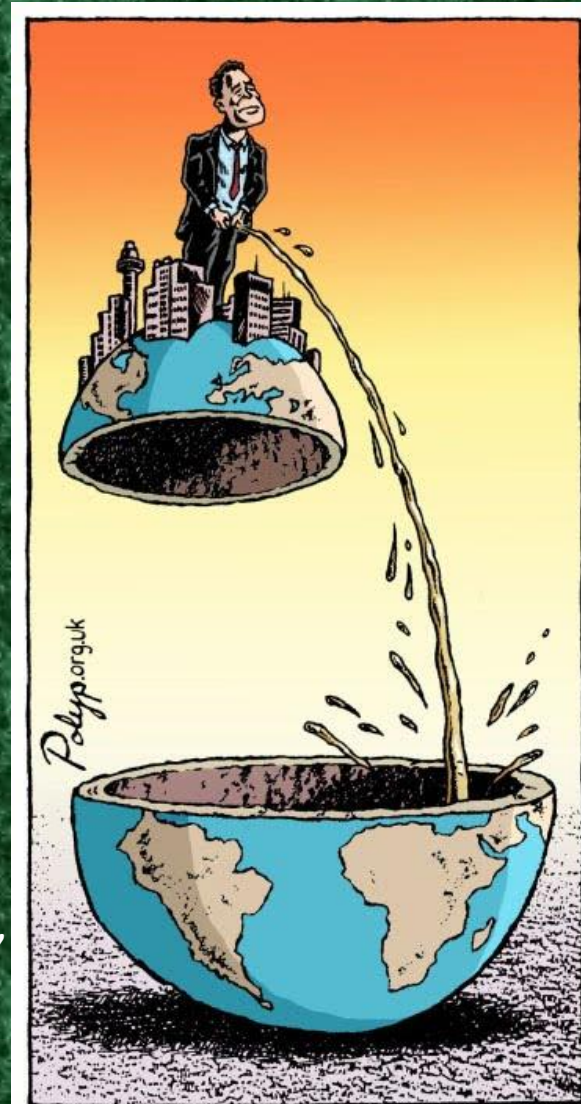
# Thinking in turbulent times

	Permaculture	Transition	Peak Oil
Sustainability	Critical	Critical/Supportive ?	Critical - too late
Resilience	Supportive and achievable	Supportive and achievable	Supportive and might be achievable
Collapse	Possible and need to prepare	Does not really consider it – goes against its positive/ empowering vision	Inevitable

# Greening business as usual... 'Green' Growth...for all...for ever



Some K. Jerome, "It is always the best policy to tell the  
truth..... unless, of course, you are an exceptionally good liar."



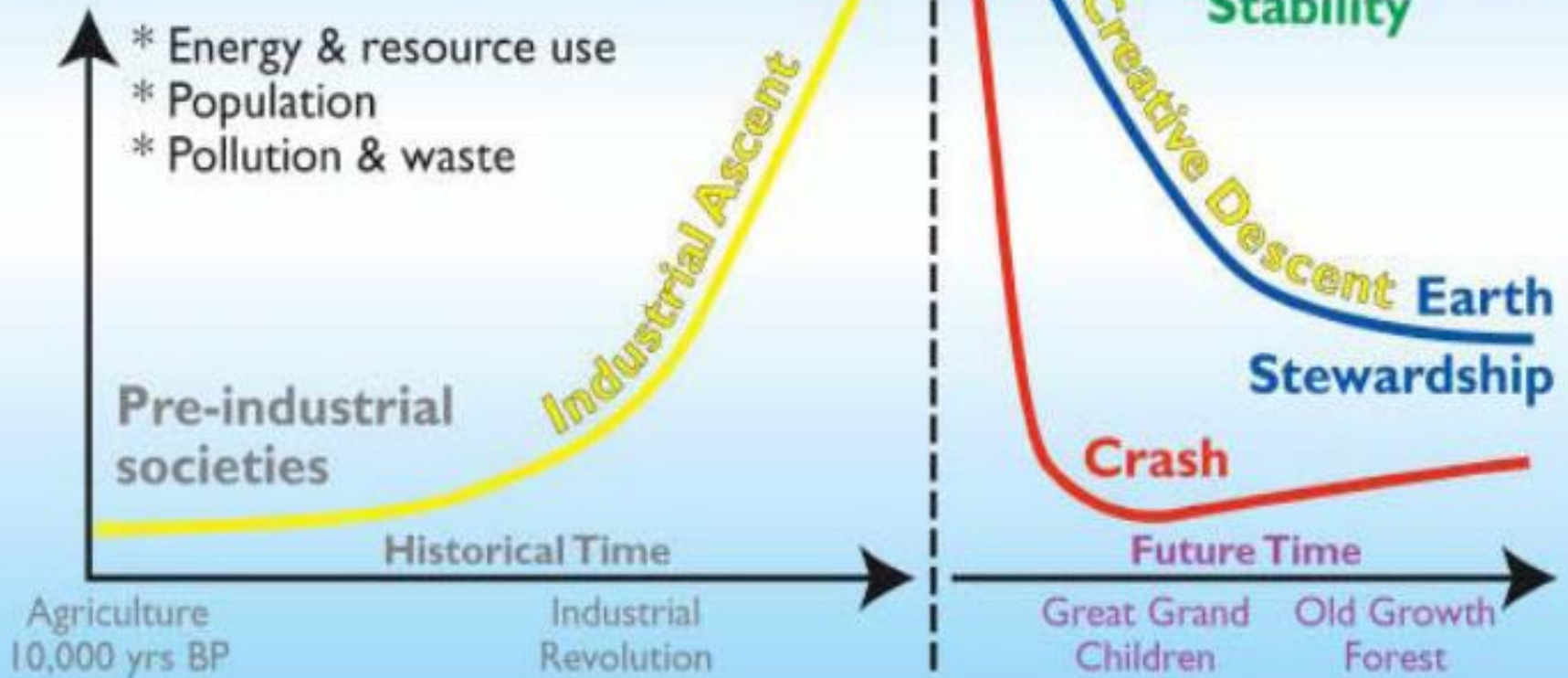
**TRICKLE DOWN THEORY EXPLAINED**

'TRICKLE DOWN'



# Our Energy Future

## Beyond Cheap Fossil Fuels



Holmgren, 2005: 7

# Visioning a World Beyond Oil

What would a post carbon world look like?  
Back to the future? ....





# Sustainability

Sustainability – interpretations vary from reformist/greening Business as Usual to radical and transformative

'Trojan horse' potential: Integrate ecological/carbon/energy dimensions with the non-ecological issues of equality, democracy, human rights, social justice, post-growth/degrowth economy

Sustainability is the choice is to live in a 'different type of society' not a 'green' version of the existing one

# Resilience

Resilience – normatively neutral concept simply denoting the capacity to respond to, anticipate perhaps, a shock (external or internal) and recover, cope with and ‘bounce back’

Capitalism is/has been (will continue to be?) resilient

A system can be resilient but not sustainable, resilient but unjust

Danger of ‘hard green’ eco-authoritarian collapse/post-collapse solutions

Resilience as a means (a ‘design principle’ in Permaculture terms) to sustainability ends?



# Advantages of Resilience

Complex adaptive management

Seems less 'un-defined' than sustainability – more robust, measureable and operationalisable?

Offers alternative principles to 'maximisation' and simple 'efficiency' – 'in built redundancy', 'head room', 'slack'

1. Corresponds/underpins/links to socio-economic principles of 'sufficiency' and 'enough' .
2. And distinguishing 'employment' and the formal/GDP economy from 'work' and a wider conception of the economy, including the social/informal economy.
3. Links to critiques of and alternatives to the dominant capitalist/ western model of development.

Illich, (1977) *The Right to Useful Unemployment*

Latouche, (1993) *In the Wake of the Affluent Society*

Princen, T. (2003), *The Logic of Sufficiency*

Colve, D. (2009) *The Economics of Enough*

# THE ECONOMICS OF ENOUGH

HOW TO RUN THE ECONOMY AS IF THE FUTURE MATTERS

DIANE COYLE



the logic of sufficiency

thomas peters



**IVAN  
ILlich**

**THE RIGHT TO USEFUL  
UNEMPLOYMENT  
AND ITS PROFESSIONAL ENEMIES**



... powerful and compelling.  
—The New Statesman

SERGE  
LATOCHE



IN THE WAKE OF THE  
AFFLUENT SOCIETY

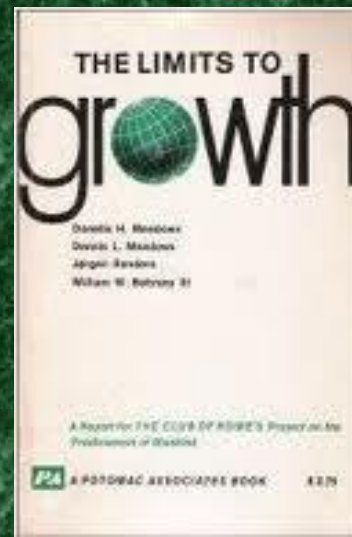
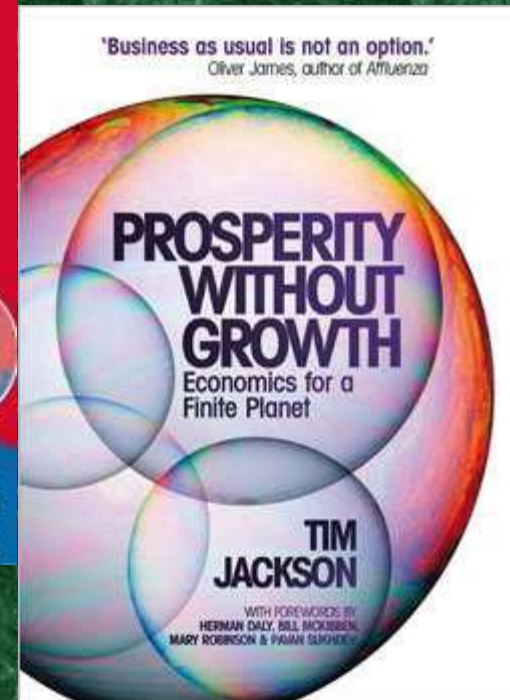
AN EXPLORATION OF  
POST-DEVELOPMENT



# Back to Limits to Growth

Evolution of green critiques from 1970s 'Limits to Growth'

1. Ecological limits
2. Well-being limits
3. Equity /social justice
4. Economic growth as an ideology



# Collapse:

*'The end of the human race will be that it will eventually die of civilisation', Ralph Waldo Emerson*

## Initiatives/Movements /Organisations/ Websites

Uncivilisation: The Dark Mountain Project

Collapsonomics

America 2.0

Association for the Study of Peak Oil

The Oil Drum

## Individuals/thinkers/writers

James Howard Kunstler, Derrick Jensen, Richard Heinberg, David Korowicz, James Lovelock, John Gray, Dimitri Orlov, Vinay Gupta, Dougald Hind, Paul Kingsnorth. John Michael Greer, Jay Hanson; Michael Ruppert

Older 'eco-authoritarians' : William Ophuls, Robert Heilbroner, Garrett Hardin

## Films, literature and documentaries

Cormac McCarthy's The Road

Life after People (documentary)

Collapse (documentary)

What a way to go: life at the end of empire

The End of Suburbia and Escape from Suburbia

Our dominant carbon-based, climate changing economic system  
Is heading for inevitable collapse – it is a matter of when and how not if.





# Eight Principles of Uncivilisation

1. We live in a time of social, economic and ecological unravelling. All around us are signs that our whole way of living is already passing into history.
2. We reject the faith which holds that the converging crises of our times can be reduced to a set of 'problems' in need of technological or political 'solutions'.
3. We believe that the roots of these crises lie in the stories we have been telling ourselves. We intend to challenge the stories which underpin our civilisation: the myth of progress, the myth of human centrality, and the myth of our separation from 'nature'. These myths are more dangerous for the fact that we have forgotten they are myths.
4. We will reassert the role of story-telling as more than mere entertainment. It is through stories that we weave reality.
8. The end of the world as we know it is not the end of the world full stop.

# How are we to think about collapse?

Is it brave, realistic and/ or defeatist and anti-human to contemplate and prepare for civilisation collapse?

Unreasoned (and ideologically or otherwise motivated) scaremongering ?

Contemplating the fragility of civilisation and our current ways of life

A post-human vision – to be welcomed to challenge the ‘arrogance of humanism’ and (potentially) ‘re-enchant our disenchanted world’ or at least recover its intrinsic and not just instrumental value?

Post-collapse thinking – what forms of knowledge, tools, concepts, ways of working do we need?

Thinking in a time of triage and turbulence: can democracy, justice, equality survive collapse?

Revisiting and learning from history: what lessons and ‘coping mechanisms’ can we learn from studying the collapse of previous societies, cultures and civilisations ?



# Thinking and Acting in Turbulent Times

Hope and realistic positivity – ‘concrete utopianism’

‘Pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will’

Coping mechanisms, acknowledgement of ineliminable vulnerability

Response is not invulnerability – impossible and counter-productive

...but resilience as a creative, community-based transformation of the material, cultural, social bases of how we live

And central to this is to think ‘beyond economic growth’, beyond GDP or GVA

Engaged research – action research for a ‘just transition’

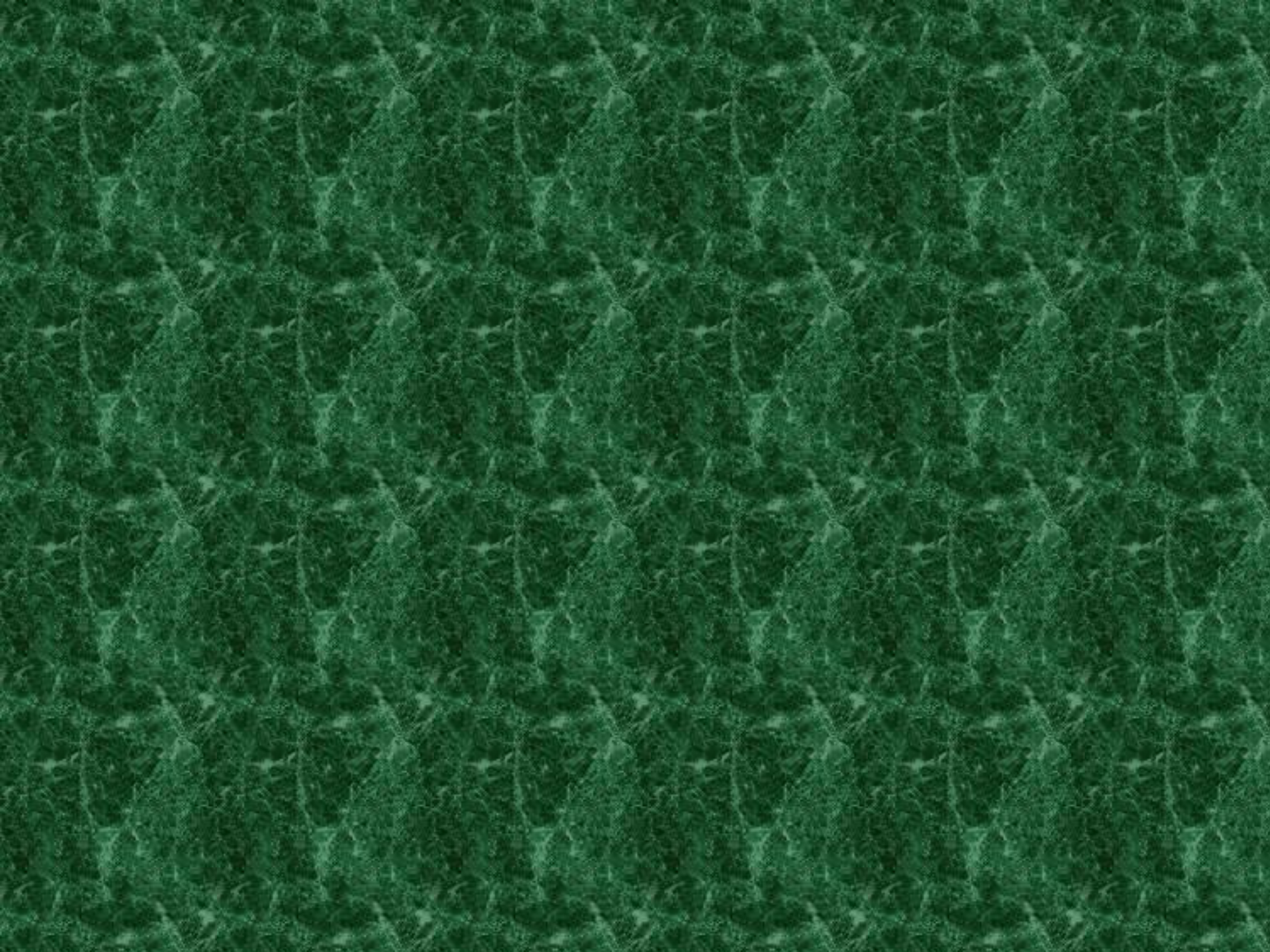
# Conclusion: New Myths and Stories to Live by?

The choice is ours.....



“Activism is the rent I pay for living on the planet” (Alice Walker)





# Equity

Economic growth is a *substitute for equality*

Economic growth under capitalism *reproduces and requires inequality*

“Economic growth, for so long the great engine of progress, has, in the rich countries, largely finished its work. Not only have measures of wellbeing and happiness ceased to rise with economic growth but, as affluent societies have grown richer, there have been long-term rises in rates of anxiety, depression and numerous other social problems. *The populations of rich countries have got to the end of a long historical journey*”. (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009: 5-6; emphasis added)





# Neo-liberalism and Economic Growth

Neoliberal political economy creates a social order which not only makes 'greed good', 'insecurity' necessary, and 'risk' both individual and natural, but also 'scarcity' ever present even amidst affluence and plenty

Economic growth is neoliberalism's 'one true social policy' (Foucault, 2008: 144)

Economic growth – social change without democratic politics

# Principles for a Macro-Economics of Sustainability

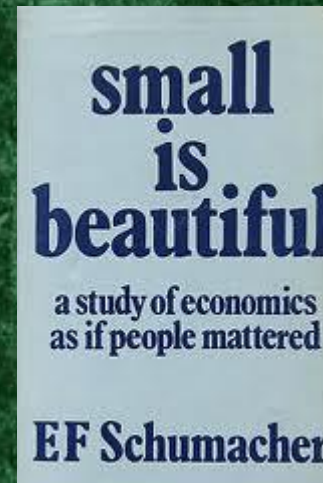
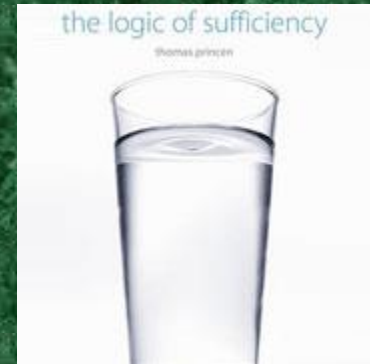
Resilience – climate change adaptation literature and permaculture

Sufficiency – as a principle of production and consumption

‘An economics of enough’

Centrality of ‘in-built redundancy’ and ‘slack’

Challenge the principle of maximisation





# From Economic Growth and Consumption to Economic Security

“People in countries that provide citizens with a high level of economic security have a higher level of happiness on average, as measured by surveys of national levels of life-satisfaction and happiness...***The most important determinant of national happiness is not income level*** – there is a positive association, but rising income seems to have little effect as wealthy countries grow more wealthier. ***Rather the key factor is the extent of income security, measured in terms of income protection and a low degree of income inequality.***”  
(Emphasis added)

International Labor Organisation, (2004), ***Security for a Better World***

Production and distribution of **economic security** as opposed to economic growth

# Well-being

Chart 9. UK life satisfaction and GDP per capita 1973-1997

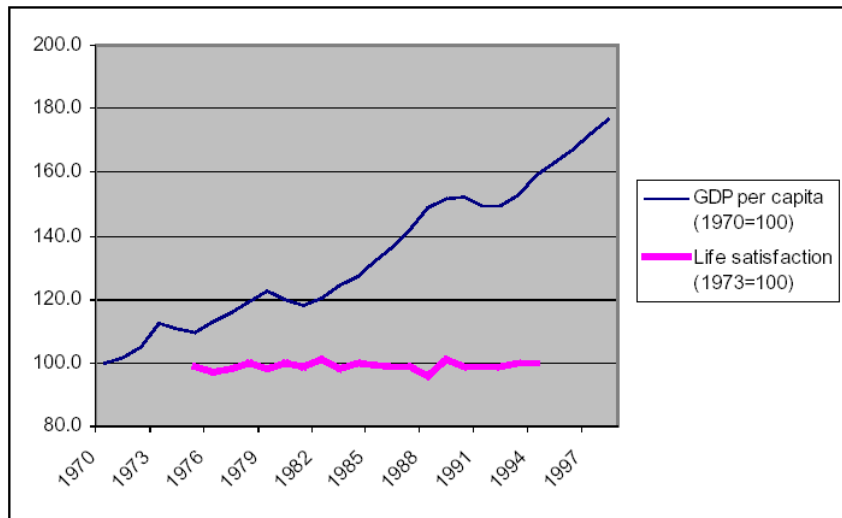
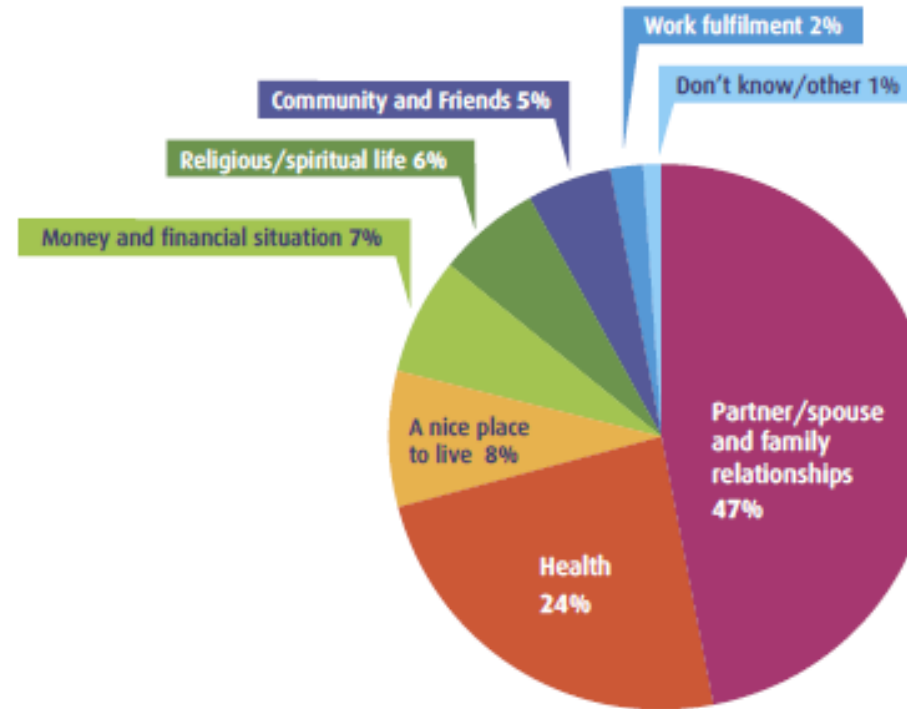


Figure 5 Factors influencing subjective wellbeing (happiness)





# Towards A Sustainable Economy: More Free Time or More Consumption?

“in the global North a successful path to sustainability must confront our commitment to growth and will ultimately entail a stabilization of consumption through reductions in hours of work. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine a globally ethical, timely, and politically feasible resolution to the global ecological crisis in which populations in the North do not reduce the number of hours worked per capita.”  
(Juliet Schor, 2005).

Use productivity gains to increase free time and social relations intrinsic to human flourishing, not increase consumption and production

What does public policy look like oriented towards removing barriers to human flourishing?

What does economic policy look like if designed with knowledge of biophysical realities ?

# A Just Transition

*Contraction and convergence* model applied from global distribution of the burdens of greenhouse gas reductions to global distribution of economic development opportunities

A steady state or contracting economy is not possible (or desirable) without a focus on socio-economic injustice and inequality

In this way it presents a profound challenge to consumerism and capitalism



# Economics and Economic Growth as Ideology

How do we explain the continuing support for orthodox economic growth in face of growing evidence that a) its ecologically impossible; b) maintains growth in inequality; c) after a threshold does not add to average well-being?

Amongst the general population and not just economic or political elites?

Economic growth (and orthodox economics) as ideological (as well as a structural imperative of capitalism)

Why when we expect pluralism about how to organise the polity is there a complete lack of pluralism when it comes to talk about organising the economy?

# Neo-classical economics as ideology

“Curiously, even though capitalism dominates the world economy, the term ‘capitalism’ is not commonly used. Even more curiously, this word is almost *never* used by economists. Neoclassical economics is dedicated to the study of capitalism; in fact, other kinds of economies (that existed in the past, or that may exist in the future) are not even contemplated. Yet the term ‘capitalism’ does not appear in neoclassical economics textbooks. Instead, economists refer simply to ‘the economy’ – as if there is only one kind of economy, and hence no need to name or define it. This is wrong. ... ‘the economy’ is simply where people work to produce the things we need and want. There are different ways to organize that work. Capitalism is just one of them. (Stanford, 2008: 33; emphasis added)



# From Buildings, Banks and Boutiques to...

‘Libraries, Laundromats and light-rail’?

Macro-economics of sustainability – greater role for Green Keynesianism, infrastructural investment, collective forms of production and consumption, investment in ecological systems and services

Growth in education, public health care, free time, community

What is the economy for? Means to an end, not an end in itself

J.S. Mill, (1848) 'Of the Stationary State', from his *Principles of Political Economy*, Book IV, Ch VI

"Towards what ultimate point is society tending by its industrial progress? When the progress ceases, in what condition are we to expect that it will leave mankind? ...

I cannot, therefore, regard the stationary state of capital and wealth with the unaffected aversion so generally manifested towards it by political economists of the old school. I am inclined to believe that it would be, on the whole, a very considerable improvement on our present condition. I confess I am not charmed with the ideal of life held out by those who think that the normal state of human beings is that of struggling to get on; that the trampling, crushing, elbowing, and treading on each other's heels, ...

***But the best state for human nature is that in which, while no one is poor, no one desires to be richer, nor has any reason to fear being thrust back, by the efforts of others to push themselves forward."***



# Final thoughts...

Perhaps above all, any post-growth politics has to focus on persuading citizens that a post-growth, post-capitalist society is one with a *higher quality of life but with less stuff/commodities*,

The choice is to live in a different economy and society with different principles and objectives

**“The ultimate question facing today’s society in developed countries is whether consumerism actually contributes to human welfare and happiness...”** (Environmental Protection Agency, Sweden, 2005).

Increase the eco-efficiency of human flourishing, not the eco-efficiency of production and consumption

# Strategic issues for a politics of 'post-growth'

Is 'post-growth' the most appropriate term?

Not against 'growth' per se, but undifferentiated orthodox growth under capitalism

How do we 'brand' 'narrate' a post-growth political economy?

Science is necessary but not sufficient – need for 'post-normal science'?

What alliances needed? Apart from greens, ...



# The Greening of Trades Unionism?

‘Global warming cannot be combated merely by making a few technical adjustments to our modes of production and consumption, for example by designing lower-carbon cars. We need to profoundly rethink our model of growth, e.g. means of transport, and hence the whole range of policies currently being implemented in pursuit of development.

***What must therefore be envisaged as of now is societal change***. (European Trade Union Institute, 2009, p.7; emphasis added)



**Just Transition Newsletter**  
 This e-newsletter keeps you informed on the activities of the European workers' movement towards a just transition into a sustainable society. It links issues on climate change, work and social justice.

etui.



# *Growth isn't Working*

“Between 1990 and 2001, for every \$100 worth of growth in the world’s income per person, just \$0.60 found its target and contributed to reducing poverty below the \$1-a-day line. To achieve every single \$1 of poverty reduction therefore requires \$166 of additional global production and consumption, with all its associated environmental impacts.”

new economics foundation (2006), *Growth Isn't Working*

Highly improbable to reconcile the objectives of poverty reduction and environmental sustainability if global growth remains the principal economic strategy. The scale of growth this model demands would generate unsupportable environmental costs; and the costs would fall disproportionately, and counter-productively, on the poorest – the very people the growth is meant to benefit.

The poor benefit weakly from economic growth i.e. those who benefit most from growth are the already affluent.

**Need to de-link poverty reduction from orthodox economic growth and focus on increasing the share of income that goes to those in poverty i.e. redistribution (which decreases inequalities) and economic security, not economic growth (which reproduces inequalities).**