

## RESPONSIBILITIES, PRUDENCE AND ECOLOGICAL IMAGINATION IN THE POSTGROWTH CONCEPTION

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**Purpose:** The aim of the paper is to analyze the categories of responsibility, prudence and ecological imagination, their mutual relations and place in the debate on postgrowth. These concepts are analyzed in the context of the issue of departure of growth, contemporary environmental threats and the complex relationship between humans and nature.

**Methodology:** The article uses a review of the literature on postgrowth and degrowth, in particular the publications of the French philosopher, economist and pioneer of the degrowth movement Serge Latouche, the British economist and sustainable development researcher Tim Jackson, and the philosopher and researcher of the rhetoric of the Anthropocene Ewa Bińczyk. The literature was analyzed in terms of selected notions and the contexts in which they appear.

**Finding:** In the era of climate threats and environmental challenges, creating alternative post-capitalist visions of the future is a key responsibility of contemporary humanities, social sciences, politics, and economics. The three interconnected themes analyzed in this article - responsibility, prudence, and ecological imagination - play a key role in understanding of capitalism's harmful delusions and formulating practical solutions for the future. Currently, researchers and humanities scholars engaged in the postgrowth movement play a particularly important role in awakening ecological imagination, preparing the foundations for social change, and creating feasible utopias that take into account environmental costs and planetary constraints.

**Research Implications:** The results suggest that the contemporary climate crisis is not only an ecological and economic crisis but above all a crisis of the social imagination, which is stuck in the irrational "iron cage" of growth.

**Practical Implications:** The visions of a post-growth future by promoting an ecological imagination and an ecological economy, they can initiate a departure of the dominant economic model.

**Social Implications:** The results can encourage a shift in thinking about economic growth, stimulate citizens' imaginations, sensitize them to environmental issues, and inspire education and policies aimed at building a degrowth society.

**Originality/value:** This article reconstructs the fundamental assumptions of the postgrowth project. It demonstrates that a different economic model based on the pillars of prosperity, sustainability, flow, and a symbiotic relationship between humans and nature, is possible.

**Keywords:** postgrowth, degrowth, Anthropocene, responsibility, prudence, ecological imagination.

**Category of the paper:** Review Paper.

## 1. Introduction

The twenty-first century, referred to by researchers as the Anthropocene, is an era of dramatic environmental challenges and complex relationships between humans and nature. The growing climate crisis and increasing economic disparities urge us to move away from the growth paradigm associated with continuous GDP growth. In the Anthropocene, it is becoming increasingly clear that economic strategies based on continuous growth in consumption and production do not translate into improved social welfare and are unsustainable on a planet with limited resources (Jackson, 2015, pp. 25-44).

At the same time, as Ewa Bińczyk demonstrates, the Anthropocene era is a time when, on the one hand, citizens of developed countries are experiencing a growing sense of empowerment and awareness of their irreversible impact on the planet, while on the other hand, they are accompanied by a feeling of powerlessness and stagnation (Bińczyk, 2018, pp. 47-76). This passivity and helplessness are reinforced by dominant economic systems that invariably fetishise growth and fail to take environmental costs into account in economic forecasts, ineffective and inconsistent geopolitical solutions, and a media industry that promotes extremely individualistic attitudes and hyper-consumption (Bińczyk, 2018, 274-275). The rhetoric used in late capitalism effectively limits the public imagination and means that, despite the real threats, we are unable to question the need for continuous growth in practice. It is therefore not surprising that the belief that it is easier for us to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism still prevails.

The response to the challenges and dilemmas of the human era are socio-economic models of greening the economy and cooling down resource consumption, which are alternatives to the primacy of growth and *business as usual*. Increasingly, projects such as postgrowth and degrowth are coming to the fore, redefining our understanding of development, prosperity and the relationship between humans and nature.

The aim of these considerations is to present the idea of departure of growth in the context of three categories that are key to understanding it: responsibility, prudence and ecological imagination. These concepts not only form the systemic political and economic framework of the postgrowth project, but above all constitute its axiological and ethical foundation. As I will attempt to prove, they are not abstract slogans, but have a real impact on the way we think about politics, economics, education and lifestyles. Their presence in the postgrowth discourse allows us to better grasp its specificity and understand the assumptions underlying the socio-cultural transformation that postgrowth entails. In this article, I will refer to the works of Serge Latouche, Tim Jackson and Ewa Bińczyk in order to explain the important role they play in building a degrowth society and shaping symbiotic and sustainable relations between humans and nature. The whole discussion is based on the assumption that the current climate crisis is not only an ecological and economic one, but above all a crisis of social imagination, which is stuck in the irrational 'iron cage' of growth.

## 2. On the idea of departure of growth

The idea of departure of growth emerged as a reaction to the ever-increasing social and environmental costs associated with unlimited economic growth. Although this postulate is now firmly established in academic and political discourse, its origins date back to the 1970s. It was then that the report for the Club of Rome, *The Limits to Growth*, was published, predicting when the population would reach ecological barriers (Meadows et al., 1972). The 1970s also saw the emergence of a social movement known as *décroissance* (eng. degrowth) in French intellectual circles. The authorship of this term is attributed to André Gorz (Kallis, Demaria, D'Alisa, 2015, p. 37), while the creative development and promotion of the idea of departure of growth is attributed, among others, to the French philosopher and economist Serge Latouche (Latouche, 2009, pp. 7-13). This movement laid the foundations for a number of diverse political, economic and social programmes, which are collectively referred to as postgrowth concepts (Skrzypczyński, 2020, pp. 7-13).

Giorgios Kallis, Federico Demaria and Giacomo D'Alisa, some of the leading theorists of postgrowth, describe it as a planned reduction in production and consumption in highly developed countries, aimed at increasing human well-being and improving environmental conditions (Kallis Demaria, D'Alisa, 2015, pp. 41-43). For Latouche, on the other hand, postgrowth is not only a proposal to slow down the pace of growth, but a project of a profound social and cultural transformation. As Latouche puts it: 'The degrowth society project is eminently revolutionary. We are talking about cultural change, as well as changes in the legal structure and relations of production' (Latouche, 2009, p. 66). Postgrowth therefore focuses not only on reorganising the economy, but also represents a conscious shift towards building a fair, sustainable society that operates within planetary boundaries.

As the postgrowth project is extensive and internally diverse, it encompasses a whole range of concepts that criticise growth, including: ecological economics, doughnut economics, ecofeminism, negative growth and the aforementioned degrowth (Skrzypczyński, 2020, pp. 7-13). In the source literature on the subject, the concepts of postgrowth and degrowth are often equated and used interchangeably, although degrowth is currently considered a more revolutionary and radical model than postgrowth<sup>1</sup>. Such interpretative clues can be found in the works of Lukas Hardt and Daniel W. O'Neill (Hardt, O'Neill, 2017, p. 198) or André Reichel, who argues that degrowth is a branch of postgrowth that assumes a radical reduction in growth in all sectors of the economy (Reichel, 2016). Timothy Crownshaw expresses a similar view. While in the case of degrowth, actions are intentional and the need of departure of growth is

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<sup>1</sup> Despite the nuances that distinguish the concepts of 'postgrowth' and 'degrowth,' in this article I will refer to both categories, treating them as convergent variations of a future without growth. The use of these terms will be consistent with the terminology adopted by the authors whose works I will refer to in this article (e.g. Serge Latouche, in outlining his vision of a future without growth, uses the term 'degrowth', while Tim Jackson more often uses the term 'postgrowth', and Ewa Bińczyk uses both categories interchangeably).

clearly declared as its overriding goal, in the case of postgrowth, the emphasis is on adapting to the decrease in the rate of growth as a kind of forced adaptation to external changes (Crownshaw, 2019, p. 117).

Despite some minor differences, it is not difficult to notice the common assumptions underlying postgrowth projects. Their distinctive and most important feature is the desire to cool down growth, resource consumption and emissions, criticism of capitalism, resistance to the fetishisation of GDP and treating it as the overriding goal of the economy and the only indicator of prosperity, moving away from the postulate of hyper-consumption in favour of limiting needs, simple living and sustainable consumption, as well as the need for profound changes in socio-cultural habits and practices.

Critical views on growth also share a common axiological core, namely the concern for current and future human well-being and the natural environment. Their aim is to outline strategies that will enable the survival of the *homo sapiens* species as a safely functioning community without exceeding the planet's limits and with respect for other forms of life (Hickel, 2019). It is worth emphasising that the ensuing changes should primarily affect developed countries and should be implemented in a spirit of global justice, without depriving the communities of poor countries of opportunities for development and the benefits that come with it (Kalis, Demaria, D'Alisa, 2015, p. 45). In addition to intergenerational justice, these models of departure of growth set the direction for changes that lead to the building of a society based on values such as community, solidarity, equality, openness, sensitivity to others, care (understood as work and care services), simplicity and sharing.

Clearly, postgrowth survival scenarios and visions of the future arranged in this vein, which constitute an alternative to the still dominant model of civilisation, not only require the courage to imagine a world with a different political and economic structure, but above all are a vision of building a committed, responsible society undergoing metabolic adjustment. The author of the work *Farewell to Growth* writes: '(...) degrowth is conceivable only in a degrowth society, or in other words within the framework of a system that is based upon a different logic' (Latouche, 2009, p. 8). British ecological economist Tim Jackson takes a similar view: '(...) that challenge compels us to develop a different kind of economic structure. But it's clear that this task isn't sufficient. We also have to find a way through the institutional and social constraints that lock us into a failing system. In particular, we need to identify opportunities for change within society – change in values, change in lifestyles, change in social structure – that will free us from the damaging social logic of consumerism' (Jackson, 2015, p. 132).

For several decades now, these researchers have been calling for a reformulation of attitudes, priorities and values that will enable the *homo sapiens* species to survive on our planet, liberate citizens from the murderous race for GDP growth, and pull them out of stagnation and fatalism. This is a shift in narrative from the language of capitalism focused on economic calculation to a language of responsibility, care and far-reaching ethical commitments adapted to current challenges. Shifting the emphasis towards ethical and moral

considerations involves revising and redefining which decisions, actions and choices we should consider prudent, reasonable and feasible in the face of the climate crisis.

Let us therefore outline some of the conditions that need to be met in order for the idea of departure of growth to have any real impact.

### **3. Responsibility: the ethical foundation of action**

The issue of responsibility and its scope is one of the most important, frequently discussed and perhaps best recognised issues in the debate on climate threats and environmental problems. In the Anthropocene era, a time when human activity has become the dominant driving and geological force, responsibility is no longer solely a moral category, but has also become a political and economic category and the foundation for the development of societies. As Latouche notes, the politically engaged project of degrowth is much closer to the ethics of responsibility, which draws attention to the moral significance of agency and refers to the consequences of human decisions, than to the ethics of duty: ‘Whilst this is a political project, its implementation has more to do with an ethics of responsibility than with an ethics of conviction’ (Latouche, 2009, p. 66).

In the growth paradigm, responsibility is usually passed on to individuals and limited to individual consumer choices (e.g., choosing eco-friendly products or sorting waste), ignoring systemic, relational, or intergenerational conditions. Postgrowth, on the other hand, clearly rejects this reductionism and proposes a more complex and broader understanding of responsibility, which includes responsibility for our shared future, for future generations and for other species. For such an expanded scope of responsibility, it is necessary to redefine existing ethical categories and, above all, the traditional understanding of the relationship between humans and nature. According to Bruno Latour, the significant impact of humans on planetary systems and the risk of climate destabilisation have led to nature ceasing to be an ethically neutral category and a silent backdrop to human activities, and becoming an active player that we must reckon with if we want to survive as a species (Latour, 2018).

As early as 1979, an attempt was made by Hans Jonas to formulate the principles of a new ethic appropriate to technological and planetary challenges. The starting point for his project is a new ethical imperative proposed in his book *The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search of an Ethics for the Technological Age* – the imperative of responsibility, which in one of its versions reads: ‘Act so that the effects of your action are compatible with the permanence of genuine human life’ (Jonas, 1996, p. 38). The German philosopher was the first to draw attention to several key issues that, for representatives of postgrowth theories, constitute an indispensable background and starting point for their politically, socially and morally engaged considerations. Firstly, he demonstrated that our actions should be considered in terms

of their long-term effects (Jonas, 1996, pp. 58-60). Secondly, he showed that applying the principle of responsibility requires developing knowledge about the future and developing possible scenarios for rational action that will protect us from the negative consequences of our current decisions (Jonas, 1996, pp. 63-65). In other words, Jonas exposed a significant qualitative change in the possibilities of human action, placing them in broader systems of interdependence (the temporally and spatially expanded scope of human agency), which in turn translated into a change in the scope of responsibility. According to this logic, postgrowth transformation must take into account the long-term nature of human actions and the long-term nature of political and economic decisions. As Jonas emphasises, in a world dominated by technology, where the effects of our decisions and actions are long-term and difficult to predict, ethical reflection must be forward-looking, cautious, reasonable, and should take into account the welfare of those who are absent and the interests of those who are unable to speak up for themselves (including future generations, nature, biosphere).

From the point of view of the considerations carried out in the article, it is the giving of an anticipatory dimension to responsibility that constitutes the greatest value of the ethical project outlined by the German philosopher. Jonas uses 'heuristics of fear' for this purpose, turning the experience of fear for one's own future and the feeling of real danger into a tool that motivates people to take long-term responsibility and to take action to protect life (Jonas, 1996, pp. 63-64). However, according to researchers in the Anthropocene, in the current reality such a strategy will not necessarily do the job. Although the very mechanism of anticipating possible scenarios and creating constructive visions of the future based on them is undoubtedly close to the social utopias created in the postgrowth or degrowth trend, it is worth bearing in mind, as Bińczyk points out, that: 'Catastrophic thinking and focusing on possible threats attract attention, but in the long run, instead of motivating us, they effectively paralyse us' (Bińczyk, 2023, p. 133). The researcher argues that excessive catastrophism and fruitless criticism should be avoided, and, like Ewa Domańska, advocates the need to create alternative and, more importantly, feasible scenarios for the future (Bińczyk, 2023, pp. 136-137; Domańska, 2017, pp. 41-43). According to Domańska, 'creating *critical* hope' is a key responsibility of contemporary humanities and natural sciences (Domańska, 2017, p. 42). The Polish researchers are in agreement that today, as humanity, we need realistic and responsible utopias that give us hope that the future is possible. Meanwhile, political and economic discourses, including those pursued within the framework of sustainable development, are at best reactive and operate *post fatum*. Domańska clearly states that in times when conflicts and threats are intensifying, we need preventive strategies: 'showing different possibilities for coexistence and social life, as well as promoting attitudes desirable for the realisation of these possibilities' (Domańska, 2017, p. 43). Therefore, another important element, alongside responsibility, that is helpful in building committed postgrowth narratives is prudence or common sense, without which it is difficult to imagine the creation of rational protective strategies that can realistically postpone the disasters we face in the Anthropocene.

#### 4. Prudence: practical wisdom in the service of departure of growth

The idea of Greek *phronesis*, treated as the starting point for postgrowth considerations, is directly referred to by Jackson. The British economist points out how much the use of this term has changed today. Jackson notes that: ‘in capitalism, prudence takes the form of a constant desire for accumulation, a powerful economic impulse’ (Jackson, 2023, p. 187). This means that in economies driven by profit measured by GDP growth, economic prudence and common-sense decisions by citizens have been reduced to the accumulation of capital, or more precisely, to sacrificing present consumption in the name of savings for future consumption and future material gains. Jackson bemoans the short-sightedness of such thinking and the impoverishment of the ‘commitment to the future’ (Jackson 2023, p. 190), as investments are referred to in economic parlance, to ‘short-term financial returns’ (Jackson, 2023, p. 195). Of course, this is not the kind of prudence and investment that involves ‘making money from money’ (Jackson, 2023, p. 195) that is meant in the postgrowth model. Therefore, Jackson, criticising prudence understood in this way, clearly signals the need to redefine this concept and identify a ‘new common sense’ on the basis of which a postgrowth type of economy can be built (Jackson, 2023, p. 187). Bińczyk shares a similar opinion, drawing inspiration not only from Jackson’s writings, but also pointing out that: ‘in order to ensure survival and break free from stagnation, we need to rebuild and redefine what we call common sense, abandoning above all the economic modes of so-called business as usual’ (Bińczyk, 2023, p. 191).

In his work *Postgrowth. Life after Capitalism*, Jackson returns to the historical sources of the term we are interested in, distinguishing two important interpretative clues. One of them is the practical and moral dimension of prudence, emphasised by ancient philosophy, which we find, for example, in the thought of Aristotle. Without delving into the intricacies of Stagirite ethics, I will only recall that the philosopher defined it as: ‘a lasting disposition to act based on a correct consideration of what is good or bad for a person’ (Aristotle, 2007, p. 197/1140b). Another clue that Jackson returns to is taken from Titian’s painting *Allegory of Prudence*, the far-sighted, future-oriented dynamics of practical wisdom (Jackson, 2023, pp. 186-188). In his conceptualisation of prudence, the economist emphasises that ‘prudence requires an awareness of continuity over time. (...) learning from the past, preparing for the future, and acting in the present’ (Jackson, 2023, p. 188).

The perspective he adopts rightly brings to mind Jonas’s principle of responsibility mentioned earlier. The British economist, like the German philosopher four decades earlier, argues that human actions, decisions and their possible consequences should be considered from a long-term perspective and thus treated as long-term moral commitments to the future (Jackson, 2023, p. 190). Ultimately, Jackson defines prudence as: ‘the ability to act wisely in the face of an uncertain future’ (Jackson, 2023, p. 187), which does not consist in the accumulation of material goods and income, as free-market capitalist models suggest,

but in caring for one's own future, that of one's family, and even that of all humanity (Jackson, 2023, p. 190) and on far-sighted ecological investments aimed at 'protecting the climate, the earth, the oceans, rivers, forests, animal habitats: our earthly home' (Jackson, 2023, p. 199). Prudence understood in this way counterbalances the assumptions of mainstream economics, reverses the dangerous trend of pursuing growth, expansive production and consumption, resource and energy intensity, presenting them as irresponsible, absurd and even immoral choices. The new common sense is the ability to resist the harmful delusions of capitalism and to seek solutions that will preserve the balance of ecological systems, while basing social progress on a sense of belonging, well-being, simple living, flow and symbiotic relationships between humans and nature. In other words, prudence is one of those skills that aims to stimulate the collective imagination to create bold, alternative, postgrowth visions of the future.

## **5. Ecological imagination: bold visions of a future without growth**

By 'ecological imagination' I mean a way of thinking and designing possible future scenarios that stems from an awareness of the planetary environmental crisis and seeks to counteract its worsening in a reasonable and effective manner, thus showing that change is possible. Ecological imagination is the driving force behind a specific thought experiment that involves creating alternatives to solutions that are considered harmful, wrong, unfair and irresponsible due to their disastrous social or environmental consequences. It is a tool for encouraging the construction of realistic utopias and for setting bold and ambitious political goals that clearly take into account the dependence of the economy on the biosphere.

In the research conducted as part of the critical approaches to the growth paradigm presented in this article, we repeatedly encounter the thesis that the contemporary climate crisis is not only an ecological and economic crisis, but above all a crisis of imagination (Bińczyk, 2023; Jackson, 2023; Latouche, 2009; Srnicek, Williams, 2019). The inability to move beyond the 'iron cage of growth' in our ideas about the future seems to be one of the reasons for the stubborn persistence of the dominant economic system, despite awareness of the risks associated with it. And although scientific examples demonstrating the irrationality inherent in the blind pursuit of growth are plentiful, scenarios for greening the economy still fall short of the logic of capitalism (Bińczyk, 2023, pp. 203-226). Bińczyk recalls that, as early as 1947, Karl Polanyi recognised that the appropriation of social discourse by the logic of excess and pro-market thinking leads to a decline in social imagination, which in turn translates into a lack of in-depth pro-environmental reflection, which we have been observing for several decades (Bińczyk, 2018, p. 274). As André Reichel and Robert Perey, followed by Bińczyk, point out, it is precisely the concepts of degrowth and postgrowth that currently constitute the best 'antidote to the lack of imagination' (Reichel, Perey, 2018, p. 245), offering constructive visions



of a future without growth and creating promising ‘social utopias for the Anthropocene’ (Bińczyk, 2023, p. 16).

Latouche repeatedly emphasised the key role of imagination in shaping new approaches and perspectives for the future, treating it as the intellectual foundation of degrowth. Referring to the philosophy of Cornelius Castoriadis, the French researcher developed the project of ‘decolonising the imaginary’, which he made the driving force behind a profound political transformation leading to the emergence of a degrowth society (Latouche, 2015, pp. 192-196). Behind the performative phrase ‘decolonising the imaginary’ lies, on the one hand, the idea of social imagination borrowed from Castoriadis and, on the other hand, a critique of imperialism derived from anthropology. The term ‘decolonisation’ itself appears here in a metaphorical sense, as a kind of semantic shift, the opposite of the appropriation of the collective imagination, language and minds by the logic of capitalism (Latouche, 2015, pp. 194-195). It is understood as a mental process involving a change in beliefs and thought processes, the rejection of dominant patterns and their replacement with an alternative model. In other words, Latouche uses the term ‘decolonisation’ to describe the process of transforming social ideas about economic growth, aiming to liberate the collective imagination from the ideology of excess, overconsumption and insatiability.

Reflection on the role of imagination in postgrowth leads to the conclusion that its function is not limited to creating new ideas and possible scenarios for the future, but primarily consists in criticising deeply rooted beliefs in capitalist societies, exposing the flawed assumptions underlying the narratives that drive growth, revealing their irresponsible consequences and publicising their irrationality. Latouche emphasises: ‘to attempt to think of an exit out of the dominant imaginary, we must first of all go back to the way we entered into it, that is, to say, to the process of economisation of minds concomitant to the commodification of the world’ (Latouche, 2015, p. 193), often using the techniques it employs, established imaginaries and their representations to promote a new postgrowth network of associations and meanings. Examples of such processes can be found not only in Latouch’s reflections, but also in Jackson’s, who believes that the principle of symbolic interactionism may be used to promote ecological and sustainable consumption (Jackson, 2005, p. 32), as well as in Bińczyk, who points to the need to change the rhetoric used in public debate to one that will support a kind of fashion for degrowth and ‘eco-zest’ (Bińczyk, 2023, pp. 187-197). Furthermore, Bińczyk proposes that the process of social and cultural change, which she refers to as the ‘socialisation of the Anthropocene’, should begin with abandoning the harmful delusions of capitalism that have led humanity to catastrophe, talking about them as moral scandals and emphasising that: ‘indeed, science fiction is practised by those who try at all costs to maintain the status quo in our politics and economy’ (Bińczyk, 2023, p. 16).

Critics of the currently dominant model unanimously emphasise that a future without growth is an ambitious goal and a bold political vision that must find its place in public debate. ‘Without the hypothesis that a different world is possible, there can be no politics, but only the

administrative management of men and things', she quotes after sociologist Geneviève Decrop Latouche (Decrop, 2007, p. 81). The point is to propose a realistic, socially just and empirically grounded programme of climate-friendly capitalism, which may seem utopian, but one that is achievable, a 'concrete utopia' in the positive sense given to the term by Ernst Bloch; a realistic utopia, grounded in the potentiality of the 'here' and 'now' (Domańska, 2017, p. 51). As Latouche declares: 'The degrowth project is therefore a utopia, or in other words a source of hope and dreams. Far from representing a flight into fantasy, it is an attempt to explore the objective possibility of its implementation' (Latouche, 2009, p. 32).

It is worth mentioning Jackson's project, which encourages us to imagine life after capitalism and proposes a realistic utopia that takes into account political, social and economic aspects as well as environmental protection (Jackson, 2023). In creating the foundations of a utopia for a post-capitalist society, the British economist refers to inspiring examples from the past, showing what lessons we can derive from them today. One of the most promising lines of thought is a change in the understanding of the relationship between humans and nature. Interestingly, Jackson does not define it in terms of struggle, competition and consumption, but rather in terms of symbiotic balance (Jackson, 2023, pp. 136-137). Inspired by the research of biologist Lynn Margulis, which shows the pursuit of symbiotic balance as a condition for the functioning of living organisms and the entire biosphere, he proposes to translate this understanding of interdependence into the relationship between humans and nature. Jackson, following Margulis, refutes the harmful belief that capitalism has been feeding us for years, namely that struggle and competition are the only drivers of evolution and progress: 'Evolution is not a constant struggle for existence, as neo-Darwinists claimed. (...) We would not be here if it were not for symbiosis. New species are the result of cooperation. Evolution is the result of joint adaptation to changing living conditions. Cooperation plays a fundamental role in our existence' (Jackson, 2023, p. 139). Symbiotic balance thus becomes an example of an alternative social practice that aims to protect life as we know it without exceeding planetary boundaries. It also sets out a framework for a new understanding of social progress based on belonging, well-being, flow and creation, i.e. activities that are marginalised and undervalued in the growth paradigm, such as caring, caregiving, creative activities, social interactions, close interpersonal relationships, physical activity, and contemplative practices. According to Jackson, further progress is possible, but it has little to do with GDP growth. It involves moving away from pressure and the pursuit of ever-increasing amounts of material goods and striving for a state of balance, achieved through activities that do not generate excessive environmental costs, but instead increase the sense of personal well-being.

## 6. Conclusion

‘At a time when our common home is on fire, our imagination should not only be unleashed, but also completely open to what is new,’ writes Bińczyk (Bińczyk, 2023, p. 194). Creating alternative visions of the future, building a society of ‘being’ rather than just ‘having’, is, in the face of real climate threats and environmental problems, one of the most important tasks, and even duties, facing contemporary humanities, social sciences, politics and economics. The three interrelated issues I have highlighted in this article, namely responsibility, prudence and ecological imagination, play a key role both in deepening our knowledge of the harmful delusions of capitalism and in formulating practical solutions for the future. As I have attempted to demonstrate, they form not only a theoretical but also a practical framework for the concept of postgrowth, and moreover, they offer an alternative to the prevailing trends in public debate based on politics of fear, trauma and passivity, while simultaneously exploiting the climate crisis. Today, it is researchers and humanists involved in the postgrowth movement who play a particularly important role in stimulating ecological and moral imagination, laying the groundwork for social change, pointing out paths that are no longer worth following, and expanding the range of future cultural and economic transformations to include scenarios that take into account environmental costs and planetary constraints. One can only ask the question: do we, as humanity, have enough imagination to envision a postgrowth alternative future?

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