

Human happiness and the stationary state

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David Purdy argues that it is time for rich countries to stop seeking further economic growth.

The relentless spread of market forces to parts of the world and sectors of the economy from which they had hitherto been largely excluded has led many on the left to the conclusion that capitalism is now too dynamic and, in its present overdeveloped and under-regulated form, threatens the future of life on Earth. This is sometimes discussed in terms of a contradiction between capitalism and nature, but this is to leave out any reference to *culture* - as if the fate of humanity and the fate of our planet were not tied together. In this article I look at some of the connections between the economy and human culture, in examining the relationship between wealth and happiness as expressed in the views of economists and philosophers from the fourth century BC to the present day. My argument is that the time is long overdue for rich countries to move towards a stationary state, loosely defined as one in which capital accumulation and economic growth have slowed down or stopped, not just temporarily, but for good. Whether such a state is feasible and how we might reach it are matters I hope to deal with elsewhere. Here my aim is simply to explain why the attempt is worth making.

Classical political economy and the stationary state

For most of recorded history, most human beings lived in conditions of gross material scarcity. Until about 1700, the world as a whole was in a Malthusian trap, the slow growth of output barely exceeding the slow growth of population. Thereafter, in North West Europe, the pace of growth quickened and output per head of population began to rise rapidly as capitalism advanced and improved methods of production were adopted. Writing in the late eighteenth century, Adam Smith attributed the growing 'wealth of nations' to the spread of commerce and the accumulation of capital. But the father of classical political economy did not expect the making and reinvestment of profits to go on forever. Eventually, he thought, opportunities for profitable investment would become exhausted and the economy would converge on a 'stationary state' in which per capita income levelled off, having in the meantime multiplied several times over. Thus, the journey on which humanity - or at any rate a portion of it - had recently embarked could be seen as a more or less prolonged and turbulent transition from a 'rude and barbarous' past to a prosperous and civilised future.

Smith's view of capitalism as an engine of progress whose historical work would one day be done was retained by his followers. Before this day arrived, however, it was important to ensure that progress was not prematurely halted by artificial restrictions and vested interests. A case in point, according to David Ricardo, was the protective tariff on imported corn introduced by the British Parliament in 1815 with the aim of keeping up the price of corn sold by British farmers and stabilising agriculture during the transition from war to peace. In urging a policy of free trade, Ricardo did not mention the stationary state in so many words, but he made the conception more definite. In a closed economy, with finite resources of land, the floor below which wages cannot fall is determined by the cost of subsistence: that is, by the price of corn. With unchanged techniques of production, this floor tends to rise as population pressure brings worse land into cultivation. Thus, the rate of profit on marginal land tends to fall towards zero. But in the long run, competition among tenant farmers brings about a uniform rate of profit on all types of land. Hence, as output and population grow and the rate of profit falls, the share of output accruing to owners of intra-marginal land in the form of rent rises. Eventually, the rate of profit will be too low to call forth new investment and economic expansion will cease.

Writing in 1848, John Stuart Mill accepted Ricardo's reasoning, but rather than dwelling on the threat of premature stagnation, he looked forward to the ultimate goal. If, he argued, we had not reached this destination long ago, it is because '... the goal itself flies before us. The richest and most prosperous countries would very soon attain the stationary state if no further improvements were made in the productive arts and if there were a suspension of the overflow of capital from those countries into the uncultivated or ill-cultivated regions of the earth.'¹ Mill positively welcomes this prospect. As Alan Ryan points out, the interesting thing about Mill's account is the way in which, 'he contrives to pick up the Romantic and Tory antipathies to the industrial revolution without relapsing into nostalgia for a vanished feudalism'.²

Mill has two objections to boundless growth. In the first place, without in any way discounting the importance of material prosperity, he disapproves of what we would now call the 'rat-race'.

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, which form the existing type of social life, are the most desirable lot of human kind, or anything but the disagreeable symptoms of one of the phases of industrial progress ... 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 ... I know not why it should be a matter of congratulation that persons who are already richer than anyone needs to be, should have doubled their means of consuming things which give no pleasure except as representative of wealth ... It is only in the backward countries of the world that increased production is still an important object. In those most advanced what is economically needed is a better distribution.

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1. This and subsequent quotes are taken from J.S. Mill, *Principles of Political Economy*, Penguin 1970, pp111-117. The export of capital to fertile regions and the introduction of improved agricultural techniques both serve to reduce the cost of producing corn. Mill presumes that these counteracting forces merely postpone the onset of the stationary state for a while, ignoring the possibility that they might keep it at bay indefinitely.
 2. Alan Ryan, *J.S. Mill*, Routledge 1974, p181.

Secondly, Mill objects to the consequences of urbanisation and overcrowding:

Solitude in the sense of being often alone is essential to any depth of meditation or of character; and solitude in the presence of natural beauty and grandeur is the cradle of thoughts and aspirations which are not only good for the individual, but which society could ill do without. Nor is there much satisfaction in contemplating the world with nothing left to the spontaneous activity of nature; with every rood of land brought into cultivation, which is capable of growing food for human beings; every flowery waste or natural pasture ploughed up, all quadrupeds or birds which are not domesticated for man's use exterminated as his rivals for food, every hedgerow or superfluous tree rooted out, and scarcely a place left where a wild shrub or flower could grow without being eradicated as a weed in the name of improved agriculture.

Mill's moral and spiritual sensibilities were not, on the whole, shared by his successors. The years surrounding his death in 1873 saw the publication of works by Menger in Austria, Jevons in England and Walras in France which launched the neo-classical or 'marginalist' school of economic thought. By the turn of the century, this new body of ideas dominated the subject, not least because it offered an alternative to the classical labour theory of value, which had acquired a distinctly radical and subversive edge in the hands of Marx and his followers. Narrowing the scope and formalising the methods of economics - as the discipline was henceforth known - in a bid to emulate the perceived success of Newtonian mechanics, neo-classical theorists set out to explain how scarce resources came to be allocated among alternative uses and how the income generated in the course of productive activity came to be distributed among the owners of capital, labour and land, the three so-called 'factors of production'. The explanation they offered started from the subjective tastes and preferences of resource-owning, utility-maximising individuals considered, for theoretical purposes, as atomised, self-contained psyches in abstraction from their social relations, forms of life and even their physical bodies. Gone from this scheme was the classical focus on class relations and social development. Gone too was Mill's conception of political economy as a *moral* science and his insistence that social progress involves more than the mere accumulation of wealth.

In the twentieth century, prior to the emergence of the green movement in

the 1970s, the only major economist to echo Mill's enthusiasm for the stationary state was Keynes. In the midst of the slump, the architect of macro-economic management and saviour of capitalism published an essay entitled *Economic Possibilities for our Grandchildren*, in which he takes wing into the future and asks: 'What can we reasonably expect the level of our economic life to be a hundred years hence?'³ In truth, as Skidelsky observes, this essay is more of a provocative *jeu d'esprit* than a serious piece of economic analysis.⁴ Nevertheless, even in playful, utopian mode, Keynes has interesting things to say about the conquest of poverty, the pursuit of happiness and the love of money.

The prospect he holds out is one in which the age-old struggle to satisfy basic human needs is finally brought to a successful conclusion thanks to science, technology and capital accumulation. The pace at which this state of bliss is approached will depend on our power to control population and our determination to avoid wars and civil dissensions. We shall still have to choose between reduced working time and the production of 'luxuries' - goods that satisfy the desire for superiority, which Keynes admits might be insatiable. But he anticipates that as the curse of Adam is lifted, ancient wisdom and religious precepts concerning the proper ends of human life will at last come into their own and people will cultivate the art of living rather than selling themselves for the means of life. In particular, the love of money as a possession - as distinct from the desire for money as an ancillary to the good life - 'will be recognised for what it is, a somewhat disgusting morbidity, one of those semi-criminal, semi-pathological propensities which one hands over with a shudder to specialists in mental disease'. 'But beware!', Keynes warns:

The time for all this is not yet. For at least another hundred years we must pretend to ourselves and to everyone that fair is foul and foul is fair; for foul is useful and fair is not. Avarice and usury and precaution must be our gods for a little longer still. For only they can lead us out of the tunnel of economic necessity into daylight.

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3. See *The Collected Writings of John Maynard Keynes* Vol. IX, *Essays in Persuasion*, Macmillan 1972. (The title of the essay is poignant: Keynes and his wife Lydia Lopokova wanted children, but failed to produce any.)
 4. Robert Skidelsky, *John Maynard Keynes, Volume 2: The Economist as Saviour*, Macmillan 1992, p237.

The new science of happiness

Seventy five years on, the worship of Mammon shows no signs of abating. But our contemporary idols - economic growth, competitive prowess, getting and spending - have recently been challenged from an unexpected quarter. Jeremy Bentham, whose body is preserved in a glass-case in the entrance-hall to University College London, has been given a new lease of life by Richard Layard, a leading British economist at the centre of the LSE-Westminster complex whose earlier work on unemployment and the labour market provided much of the rationale for New Labour's welfare-to-work policies. Drawing on research in neuroscience, psychology, sociology, economics and ethics, Layard seeks to reconstitute the philosophy of utilitarianism by supplying it with the scientific tools and evidence that Bentham lacked.⁵

Bentham held that both private conduct and public policy should be governed by one supreme goal, which he dubbed 'the greatest happiness principle'.⁶ In choosing between alternatives, he argued - whether general rules and practices or specific states of affairs and courses of action - both individuals and governments should seek to bring about the greatest overall happiness. He equated happiness with pleasure or the absence of pain (incidentally disregarding such anomalies as the happy martyr or the inveterate masochist). And pleasure, he thought, was a positive feeling tone, analogous to body temperature, which can be experienced by all human beings - and, indeed, by all animals with more than minimal levels of sentience - varying only in intensity and duration, though, of course, the objects capable of producing it are almost infinitely various.

Bentham would dearly have loved to be able to measure happiness, thus defined, so that public policy could be transformed into what he called a 'felicific calculus'. Until recently, however, the scope for *direct* measurement was limited. This did not matter greatly where the object of policy was to prevent or relieve suffering since there is a fair degree of consensus about the main causes of human misery - fear, pain, ill-health, poverty, squalor, ignorance, oppression, loneliness, etc. But where the issue was how best to make people positively

5. Richard Layard, *Happiness: Lessons from a New Science*, Allen Lane 2005.

6. This principle is usually rendered as 'the greatest happiness of the greatest number'. As Layard notes, though this phrase was coined by Bentham, he subsequently regretted it, preferring the more open-ended, less prescriptive formulation given here.

happier, about which there is far less agreement, policy-makers fell back on *proxies*. Chief of these was Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which purports to measure what society as a whole finally gets from its combined productive activities in the course of some specified period of time - though it is worth noting that national income accounting originated as an adjunct of Keynesian economics, not as a means of figuring out aggregate happiness.

Layard's starting point is that it *is* now possible to measure happiness directly: by asking people how they feel; by asking their friends or other observers for an independent assessment; and by measuring electrical activity in the relevant parts of a person's brain. These different methods give remarkably consistent answers and enable us not only to track fluctuations in someone's happiness over time, but to compare the happiness of different people. The measures are still crude, but suffice to establish, beyond reasonable doubt, that happiness is an objective phenomenon and varies along a single continuum, from the utmost misery to the sheerest joy. Armed with the new measuring techniques, investigators have set about using a variety of sources and methods - interviews, surveys, personal diaries and controlled experiments - to ascertain whether people are becoming happier over time, to compare levels of happiness in different countries and to discover what makes people happy. Layard seeks to summarise and explain their findings and to draw out the implications for public policy.

The most striking findings concern the relationship between income and happiness. In all countries, the rich are, on average, happier than the poor. Likewise, up to a per capita income level of around \$20,000 a year, as poor countries grow richer, their inhabitants grow happier. Above this threshold, however, the correlation breaks down: affluent societies do not become happier as they become richer. In the US, for example, people are no happier now than they were in 1950, although per capita income has more than doubled. There has been no increase in the number of 'very happy' people, nor any substantial fall in those who are 'not very happy'. The story is similar in Britain, where happiness has been static since 1975. And even in those countries like Italy where happiness has risen, the rise is small relative to the huge increase in incomes.

What explains the paradox of wealth? One factor is social comparison. What matters for most people is not just their absolute income, but their income

relative to that of others with whom they compare themselves. In an extreme case, where people care *only* about their relative income, economic growth *cannot* improve happiness, for if all incomes grow by the same percentage and all reference groups remain stable, everyone's happiness will remain unchanged. This psychological mechanism is compounded by the effects of habituation. In affluent societies, living standards resemble addictive drugs: once you have a new experience, you need to keep on having more of it in order to sustain your happiness. You are on a 'hedonic treadmill' where you have to keep running in order to stay in the same place. There are, however, some experiences that people never fully adapt to in this sense, whether these be miseries like bereavement, trauma and persistent loud noise, or enjoyable things like sex, friendship and aesthetic delight.

So what does make us happy? At an individual level, according to the evidence, age, gender, looks, IQ and education make a negligible difference, other things being equal. The main factors, in descending order of importance, are family relationships, financial situation, participation in socially valued work, friendship, the quality of community life and personal health. Two further factors, the relative importance of which cannot yet be gauged, are personal freedom and one's inner self and philosophy of life. Comparing one country with another, average happiness (along with the suicide rate) can largely be explained by the proportion of people who say that other people can be trusted; the proportion of people who belong to social organisations; the divorce rate; the unemployment rate; the quality of government; and religious belief.

The policy implications of the new science run directly counter to prevailing conventional wisdom. For example, instead of promoting the 'work and spend' culture, governments should be trying to curb the rat-race by taxing work-rich, time-poor lifestyles, just as we tax addictive and polluting expenditures on alcohol and tobacco. Similarly, whilst a child-friendly and non-gendered version of full employment should remain a top policy priority, the current vogue for flexible labour markets and geographical mobility should be resisted as being inimical to personal security, family relationships and community cohesion. The same goes for the cult of performance-related pay and the perpetual reorganisation of work, both of which undermine non-monetary work motivations and professional pride. More generally, the neo-liberal ideal in which all social interaction is based on voluntary exchange within a framework

that permits 'continuous re-optimisation' and thereby precludes long-term commitment, should be condemned as a dystopian nightmare. Conversely, while some inequalities of reward are required as work incentives, there is now hard empirical support for the old progressive intuition that the poor gain more happiness from each additional dollar of income than the rich, providing a powerful argument for redistributing income in favour of the poor both within each state and across the world.

Layard makes a strong case. It would be stronger still if it were grounded in a better understanding of the dynamics of contemporary capitalism and the process of commodification - the tendency for capitalist commodity production to crowd out non-capitalist economic activity, subjecting an ever increasing proportion of social life to the disciplines and norms of the market. At the same time, when it comes to public policy, Layard claims too much. It is one thing to show that the Anglo-American model of capitalism fails the happiness test, but quite another to suggest that the greatest happiness principle can fill the vacuum left by the decline of religion and the demise of socialism, and so underpin renewed efforts to define and pursue the common good.

In the first place, to say that our aim should be the greatest happiness of all immediately raises the question as to who counts and how much. There can be no good reason for excluding any human being currently alive or for giving more weight to some categories of people than to others: in Bentham's words, 'each should count for one and none for more than one'.⁷ But how should we deal with the interests of other species and of future generations of humans? We might also question whether, as Layard maintains, happiness is a supreme value to which all other values - such as personal autonomy or social justice - are ultimately subordinate. And of course, where the consequences of alternative options are shrouded in genuine uncertainty - as distinct from calculable risk - happiness ceases to be a serviceable criterion for deciding what to do.

'instead of promoting the "work and spend" culture, governments should be taxing work-rich, time-poor lifestyles'

7. As the utilitarian philosopher Peter Singer has argued, this principle is perfectly consistent with approving abortion, infanticide and euthanasia in cases where is good reason to believe that the lives of those concerned are not worth living. The issue is what counts as a good reason and according to whom.

But if happiness cannot simply be substituted for GDP as the lodestar of public policy, its claims can hardly be disregarded. To elucidate these claims and gauge their importance, we need to examine the concept of happiness more closely and consider how it relates to conceptions of the human good.

The pursuit of happiness: a modified Aristotelian account

Ordinarily, when we say that someone is happy we mean that they feel good about their life or situation, and have a good measure of whatever we think is important, either in life generally or for anyone in that situation. In some contexts we are more concerned with happiness as a state of mind or feeling, in others with the circumstances that give rise to this state. Typically, for short-run purposes, we focus on the subjective side of happiness; if we are interested in long stretches of time, the objective side comes to the fore.

Philosophers of happiness have generally been concerned with what it is for a life to go well. Some have offered purely materialist accounts of human flourishing. Hobbes, for example, an early precursor of neo-classical economics and rational choice theory, sees human beings as sensuous matter in motion, ruled by natural appetites and aversions and experiencing a succession of desires which terminate only in death - of which the most basic is the desire for self-preservation. Construing 'good' and 'bad' as words we use to dignify our likes and dislikes, Hobbes denies that there is any ultimate end or supreme good for humankind 'as is spoken of in the books of the old moral philosophers'. Post-materialists, presumably, have more time for ancient and medieval ethics. And in the Western philosophical tradition, the most celebrated and influential answer to the question what kind of life is best for human beings is that provided by Aristotle.

In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle is concerned with lifetime happiness.⁸ He does not suppose that happiness is the immediate aim of every action: rather, if we arrange human ends in a hierarchy, it is, he thinks, the *ultimate* aim. He is not, however, a utilitarian: it is not the *consequences* of actions that concern him and whether they will bring about the greatest overall happiness, but what is necessary for people to make a success of *their own* lives. He assumes

8. The Greek word *eudaimonia* covers a wider range than 'happiness', the English word normally used to translate it, spanning states of mind from ecstasy to contentment and giving greater weight to the objective side of happiness, as in expressions such as 'by a happy co-incident'.

that human beings do, as a matter of fact, pursue what they take to be their own happiness. But he also believes that most people have incomplete or mistaken notions about how happiness is to be achieved. In this sense, the *Ethics* is not a work of moral philosophy, but a guide to the art of living: Aristotle is seeking to correct received notions about happiness so that people can be more successful in pursuing natural human ends.

Of course, some of Aristotle's prescriptions are culture-bound. But equally, as Martha Nussbaum has argued, much of what he has to say transcends local traditions and practices and speaks to permanent features of the human condition: namely, the finitude and limitations we encounter as social animals who are subject to natural forces and live in political communities.⁹ Each of the 'virtues' or forms of excellence he discusses corresponds to a sphere of human experience and activity that figures in more or less any human life, a sphere in which more or less anyone will have to form judgments, make choices and reach decisions. Thus, courage relates to our fear of damage, especially death; moderation to our bodily appetites and pleasures; justice to the distribution of limited resources; generosity to the way we manage our time and resources in our dealings with others; and so on. A general description of these virtues is necessarily going to be 'thin', however, and, in any specific context, will need to be balanced by a keen awareness of particulars: as Aristotle is at pains to stress, ethics is not a precise science. By the same token, there is no need to insist that there must always be only *one* way of exhibiting the relevant virtue; general rules of conduct, like the rules of medicine and navigation, are open to revision in the light of new circumstances.¹⁰

If we compare Aristotle's account of what it is for a life to go well with that offered by materialist philosophers and modern economists, two contrasts stand out. The latter suppress the distinction between wants and needs, stress the infinite variety of wants and think of reason in purely *instrumental* terms as the faculty that enables us to satisfy our wants, whatever they happen to be.

9. See Martha Nussbaum, 'Non-Relative Virtues: an Aristotelian Approach', in M. Nussbaum and A. Sen (eds), *The Quality of Life*, Oxford University Press 1993.

10. The English word 'virtue' is always morally evaluative. The Greek word *arete* by which it is normally translated carries the additional, morally neutral sense of 'excellence' or 'technical proficiency'.

Aristotle, in contrast, applies reason to the *ends* that people seek, focusing on what they might be or what they might do with their lives: in other words, on their actions, activities and projects. He rejects the ascetic view that worldly goods - wealth, health, reputation, sexual gratification, etc - are irrelevant to the pursuit of happiness, but he insists that the difference they make is strictly limited and does not begin to compare with the difference made by the cultivation and exercise of the virtues. For this reason, he has no compunction about comparing different kinds of person and character and declaring some to be better, in point of happiness, than others. Such inter-personal comparisons are anathema to modern economists, for whom it is axiomatic that each person is the best judge of his or her own interests.

The second contrast concerns consumption. Whereas modern economists assume that the desire to consume can never be sated, Aristotle argues that the best kind of life requires no more than a sufficiency of material goods. Of course, standards of sufficiency vary more from one age or culture to another than he could have realised. Nevertheless, had he foreseen the way we live now, he would have said that it is irrational to aim at unlimited wealth and he would not have been surprised to learn that, after per capita income has reached a certain level, economic growth does not make people happier. An appreciation of this does not make it necessary to endorse Aristotle's view that we can only be perfectly happy if we devote as much time as possible to philosophy - that is, to contemplating the truths of some theoretical discipline - which he thinks is as near as humans can get to the paradigm of happiness represented by the gods. Indeed, one could argue that elevating intellectual activity - and intellectual activity narrowly conceived at that - above, say, affection and sympathy for others, aesthetic sensibility or engagement in public affairs, is inconsistent with the doctrine of balance that Aristotle commends in his account of the virtues. The important point is that material well-being is no more than a precondition for human happiness. Once this is granted, we can readily accept that there is more than one way of devoting one's life to non-materialistic goals.

Capabilities, commodities and life-projects

There is a close affinity between Aristotle's view of the human good, suitably shorn of intellectualist prejudice, and the framework Amartya Sen has

developed for evaluating human well-being in terms of capability and functionings, as Sen himself has acknowledged.¹¹ 'Functionings' are the various things a person might, in principle, do or be, either at a particular point or stage in life or over their life as a whole. 'Capability' is that sub-set of these beings and doings which the person can actually achieve and from which they are able to choose. Sen's approach differs from the standard utilitarian or, more generally, 'welfarist' approach in accommodating a variety of human acts and states as being *intrinsically*, and not merely *instrumentally*, important. In many situations, he argues, being a free agent is something we value for its own sake, even if it makes no material difference. To take his favourite example, fasting is not the same as starving. Conversely, Sen attaches no *direct* importance to the means of living or the means of freedom. Factors such as income, wealth or primary goods are important only in so far as they serve as inputs to valuable functionings and capabilities.

For the purpose of designing or evaluating policies intended to promote capability, Sen draws distinctions between well-being and agency goals; and between achievement and freedom to achieve. This yields four different concepts of personal advantage: well-being achievement; agency achievement; well-being freedom; and agency freedom. These concepts are interrelated, but they are not identical and their relative importance varies in different cases. Thus it may sometimes be more important to promote well-being freedom than well-being achievement - as, for instance, in aiming to motivate people and providing them with the skills they need to look after themselves and to acquire greater personal autonomy. In other cases, well-being achievement matters more: thus the well-being of new-born babies depends mainly on being well-nourished, warm and loved. The assessment of agency goals tends generally to be a broader exercise than the evaluation of well-being. Equally, standard of living is a narrower concept than well-being. For example, the happiness generated by a purely other-regarding achievement, such as freeing political prisoners in distant countries, may enhance a person's well-being without, in any obvious sense, raising their living standard.

Sen commends his approach as an antidote to the commodity fetishism that pervades traditional, income-centred analyses of poverty. 'Basic needs'

11. Amartya Sen, 'Capability and Well-Being', in *The Quality of Life* (see note 9).

tend to be defined in the form of needs for goods and services which are commonly provided via the market - food, shelter, clothing, health care, etc. If we focus instead on 'basic capabilities', we are less likely to forget that these commodities are no more than the means to ulterior ends, and more likely to ask questions: about whether the ends themselves are worthwhile; and about the best means of pursuing them, both in general and in any particular case. This point can be generalised to all aspects of social development and policy. With any set of social activities, from parenting and schooling to work and recreation, it is essential, at least from time to time, to step back from the fray and ask: what is really worth doing or being, for anyone at all? And what is the best way of enabling and encouraging people in general or someone in particular to pursue these goals?

Moreover, as this formulation shows, the capability framework applies to one and all: to each person as a separate individual and to all human beings taken collectively. It thus offers the left a way of reclaiming the discourse of individual freedom from pro-market, anti-collectivist liberals without abandoning a proper concern for humanity as a whole and without losing sight of the truth that individual lives are socially embedded. Indeed, when combined with a modified Aristotelian ethic of happiness, capability theory offers a better basis for defending and developing personal autonomy than free market theology; for instead of treating *all* expressions of desire as sacrosanct, regardless of their origins or objects, it posits an ideal in which individuals strive to master their passions, take responsibility for themselves and make the most of their lives, whether in pursuit of personal or collective goals. These are big ideas. Which is just as well, for in a world driven by the expansionism of capitalist commodity production, nothing less than a cultural revolution stands a chance of slowing down the pace of economic growth and hastening the advent of the stationary state.