

Moral Disagreement between a Degrowth- and a Green-Growth-Bioeconomy

Abstract of a paper to be presented at the conference Ethics in a
Global Environment

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Keywords: Transition to Sustainability, Bioeconomy, Good Life, Justification of Risk-Attitudes

In my talk, I shall analyse the ethical controversy between the official Bioeconomy policy strategies and their grassroots alternatives. Bioeconomy envisions a reorganization of current fossil economies – economies using fossils as substantial part of their resource base – into economies which deploy renewable resources from land and sea instead (Sillanpää and Ncibi 2017, 31). Official bioeconomy strategies recommend a certain kind of industrial policy aiming at creation of high-valued market activities which use renewable resources instead of fossils (e.g. Die Bundesregierung 2020; European Commission 2018).

Firstly, I shall reconstruct the argument which most plausibly justifies policy recommendations of official Bioeconomy strategies. I shall argue that such an argument presupposes the following claims which are also supported by advocates of ‘Green Growth’ or ‘Green Economy’ strategies:

- It is necessary to keep the aggregated economic product (often measured as GDP) at a non-diminishing level to sustain individuals’ quality of life at a morally acceptable level.
- Biotechnological development, if supported by policy instruments from the official bioeconomy strategies, will likely enable establishment of economies

generating the required high gross domestic product, which comply with the existing environmental limits within the remaining time and which will not cause additional global injustices.

These claims have been criticized by proponents of ‘Degrowth’ or ‘Post-Growth’ positions. Advocates of the latter believe opposing claims to be true:

- Quality of life at an adequate level is also attainable in a society with much lower economic output than in the current wealthy economies.
- (i) technological progress which is required for meeting the goals of Sustainable Development will likely not succeed in time and (ii) promotion of technological progress will likely intensify the existing inequalities between the Global North and the Global South, fortifying phenomena such as “land grabbing”.

Having identified controversial propositions within bioeconomy strategies, I shall discuss the disagreement **in the second step**. I shall argue that it results from opposing commitments to two ethical claims: (i) conception of a good life; (ii) principle for risk-taking.

The first controversy revolves around the question how much market and non-market constituents of well-being contribute to the overall level of well-being (quality of life). Proponents of both positions, Degrowth and Green Growth, agree that conception of a good life has several constituents. Some of these constituents can be better realized by market exchanges, others by non-market activities. But they disagree on how to weigh these constituents into an aggregate of well-being

The second disagreement results from divergent assessment of risks run by the available options for action. Green Growth advocates are committed to the claim that we ought to bear the risks from technological development instead of the risks resulting from the transformation of social systems. Degrowth advocates, in turn, are committed to the claim that we are morally obliged to take the risks resulting from the transformation of socio-economic institutions.

Finally, I shall turn to the question how exactly participants of a deliberation process should come to a judgment which of the controversial normative claims to accept. Regarding the contradicting conceptions of a good life, neither the Degrowth nor the Green Growth advocates are committing a cognitive mistake or presupposing a normative principle which contradicts a well-established

moral principle (or what Rawls (1951) called “considered judgements”). Regarding the principles for risk-taking presupposed within the Degrowth and the Green-Growth position, I shall argue that the risk-attitude of the Degrowth-position is better justifiable than the risk-attitude of Green-Growth.

References

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