European Journal of Sustainable Development (2024), **13**, 3, 212-232 ISSN: 2239-5938
Doi: 10.14207/ejsd.2024.v13n3p212

Sustainable Development Revisited: Rethinking Growth-Centric Paradigms Through the Lens of the Sabbath

By Molly Graham[1],

ABSTRACT:
This paper argues that the current growth-centric paradigm of sustainable development is fundamentally flawed and proposes a paradigm shift towards the biblical concept of the Sabbath. It critiques the internal contradictions of the SDGs and challenges the unsustainable pursuit of infinite growth in addressing social and ecological crises. By exploring Sabbath's principles of rest, recalibration, and redistribution, the paper offers an ethical foundation for self-limitation and a basis for human identity beyond productivity—addressing the shortcomings of the degrowth movement. It proposes practical applications of Sabbath principles at individual, community, and structural levels, drawing upon empirical examples to demonstrate their potential as pathways to environmental justice. These multi-level applications aim to bridge the gap between the intentions of international agreements and impactful local action. The paper concludes that Sabbath presents a transformative vision for sustainable development and environmental justice, fostering a harmonious relationship between humanity and the planet.

Keywords: Sustainability, Development, Sabbath, Degrowth, Capitalism, Environmental Justice, Poverty, Well-being, Ethics, Religion.

1. Introduction

At the temporal midpoint of implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, political momentum has widely failed to be converted into action. This paper is a reaction to the mounting evidence that exposes a paradox at the core of these global goals: the dominant economic paradigm at the foundation of these strategies is the driving *cause* of the social deprivation and ecological depletion they exist to eliminate. Consequently, sustainable development is a chimaera, rendered impotent by the internal contradictions of the growth-centric theory of change undergirding the Sustainable Development Goals. Thus, to capacitate an agenda that can simultaneously halt ecological overshoot and eradicate poverty, we must consider praxes beyond the current paradigm of capitalist realism. Hence, I adopt a post-development lens to imagine a radically alternative future that reinstates a millennia-old practice of liberation—the Sabbath. I theorise the Sabbath as a structural commitment to reforming relations between labour, humans, progress, and the environment. As such, the Sabbath provides a robust and practical response to the wealth of scrutiny levied towards strategies within the contemporary sustainable development model. Particularly, I argue that a multi-level reinstatement of the Sabbath overcomes the limitations of the major post-development paradigm, degrowth, by providing an ethical foundation for self-limitation and a basis for

[1]University of Toronto, Canada.

human identity beyond productive capacity. Under this theoretical understanding, I will conclude by proposing pragmatic strategies for implementing a Sabbath to transform development work from palliative care for capitalist societies to preventative treatment for emancipation from structural violence.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) serve as a cornerstone for international consensus, political momentum, and resource allocation in development programs from 2015 to 2030 and beyond. Implicit in these global objectives is the belief that through incremental adjustment, we can make production, consumption, and trade sustainable *while maintaining* robust economic growth rates (Kothari et al., 2014). However, despite initial optimism surrounding the SDGs' comprehensive vision for sustainable development, the midpoint assessment revealed significant shortcomings—over 30% of targets show no progress or regression below the 2015 baseline (United Nations Statistics Division, 2024). The World Bank's (2022) recent report, *Poverty and Shared Prosperity 2022: Correcting Course* further underscores the grim lack of progress toward the 2030 goals. Indeed, it projects that 7% of the world's population will still experience extreme poverty in 2030, far short of the ambitious 3% global goal. Unforeseen global shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic and international conflicts, insufficient financing, and the siloed nature of SDG approaches are proposed as contributing to this lack of progress despite clear targets and indicators (Fuso Nerini et al., 2024).

2. Internal contradictions of the Sustainable Development Agenda

The growth-centric paradigm undergirding Sustainable Development Goal 1: *End poverty in all its forms everywhere* is impractical and counterproductive. The theory of change embedded in the 2030 Agenda implies that GDP growth is essential to achieve the 2030 Agenda's objectives on poverty, energy use, education, health, and more. Yet, from a cursory glance at SDG 1, we can grasp the incoherencies of this strategy. The basic assumption is that GDP growth creates gainful employment for the poor, a link that degrowth scholar Jason Hickel (2015) states is increasingly tenuous. However, even assuming this mechanism to be true, "given the existing ratio between GDP growth and the income growth of the poorest" to eradicate poverty would necessitate a global economy "175 times its present size" (Hickel, 2019b, p. 880). Further research by David Woodward (2015) suggests that the timeframes and ecological implications associated with a dependence on infinite growth render it an untenable strategy for poverty eradication. Woodward contends that "even if we were to resume the pre-[2008 crisis] pattern of income growth immediately and sustain it indefinitely, extreme poverty would persist for more than a century" (p. 58). The ecological tensions facing SDG 1 occur between known methods of reducing poverty and the need to prevent large-scale climate catastrophes. Current estimates suggest that even under optimistic assumptions, present methods of poverty eradication will overshoot all planetary bounds before achieving this goal (Hickel, 2019b, p. 873). It is not only that poverty reduction methods cause climate change, but also that climate change *increases* poverty, creating a feedback loop that inhibits the concurrent achievement of SDG 1 and SDG 13: *Climate Action*.

Economist Kate Raworth (2012) contends, however, that it *is* feasible to eradicate poverty without overstepping planetary boundaries—by pursuing redistribution rather than relentless growth. She posits that ending income poverty for the 21% of the global

population who live on less than $1.25 a day would "require just 0.2 per cent of global income" (p. 19). Therefore, systemic change is hindered not by a lack of means, but by the entrenched paradigm within sustainable development that views progress as linear material growth. If we are to reconcile the humanity-nature dualism and challenge the "economisation of life," (Adams et al., 2019, p. 1388) we must dissolve the traditional conflation of progress with production and supersede it with alternative views.

3. Infinite growth on a finite planet

According to post-growth scholars, the "growth" paradigm underlying sustainable development practices is largely accepted with absolutism "as an unquestioned imperative and naturalized need" (Asara et al., 2015, p. 375). This absolutism places the assumed epistemologies of neoliberal capitalism beyond legitimate political contestation or reimagination. In the book *Capitalist Realism*, Mark Fisher (2009) states that our contemporary moment experiences "a deeper, far more pervasive, sense of exhaustion, of cultural and political sterility" (p. 7) when it comes to transitional approaches out of capitalism. The discourse of capitalist realism, however, reproduces in ignorance of the reality that "capitalism systematically undermines the biophysical conditions on which it depends in the pursuit of capital accumulation" (Asara et al., 2015, p. 377). To present alternative counter-hegemonic praxis, we must first critically engage with capitalism as a root cause of unsustainability.

Degrowth is one post-growth discourse that aims to re-politicise our implicit assumptions of the relationships between society, the economy, and environmental sustainability. Degrowth is defined as "an equitable downscaling of production and consumption that increases human well-being and enhances ecological conditions at the local and global level, in the short and long term" (Schneider E.C. et al., 2021, p. 512). Contrary to current activities, the notion of degrowth does not attempt to elevate society from a position of "underdevelopment" to a desired threshold of "development" through the application of policies, instruments, and indicators.

The SDG mandate hinges on the assumption that GDP can be completely decoupled from its material footprint while sustaining global economic growth. It is necessary to decouple GDP from material footprint because current production and consumption levels are operating at a completely unsustainable level, "overshooting our planet's capacity by about 50 per cent each year" (Hickel, 2015). Yet, rather than present growth as the problem, the SDGs take for granted that technical innovations in efficiency will suffice to reconcile the tension between growth and ecological sustainability. While technological solutions like Bioenergy with Carbon Capture and Storage (BECCS) and expanded nuclear power are often presented as pathways to rapid decoupling, academic literature increasingly highlights their limitations. BECCS faces challenges of scalability, potential land-use conflicts, and the sustainability of large-scale biomass sourcing (Davis, 2023; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2019). Nuclear power, while offering low-carbon electricity generation, grapples with safety concerns, long and costly construction timelines, and the unresolved issue of long-term radioactive waste management (Potter, 2023; Spence et al., 2010). Consequently, these proposed solutions may lack the necessary immediacy and guaranteed effectiveness at substantially reducing emissions to address the urgent demands of climate change mitigation.

Japanese philosopher Kohei Saito also challenges our reliance on technology to decouple advanced economies from their carbon emissions. In his book *Slow Down (2024), Saito asserts* that innovation cannot absolve the West from radically reconfiguring its relationship with mass consumerism as the relentless pursuit of efficiency, while seemingly beneficial, paradoxically fuels a cycle of increased production. Technological advancements often displace workers, necessitating the creation of new industries and products to maintain employment and economic growth: "In capitalism, even if we increase efficiency, technology is simply used for the sake of producing more… The greater the efficiency, the more we produce and therefore the more resources and energy we consume" (Saito, 2023). This phenomenon, coupled with the profit-driven incentive to maximize output creates a surplus of goods and services unnecessary for human well-being and planetary health. There exists, therefore, a feedback loop where innovation fuels consumption, negating the potential carbon savings from improved technology, and ultimately undermining any attempts to decouple economic growth from its environmental toll.

In sum, Hickel (2019a) claims that an absolute global decoupling of GDP from material footprint is not possible in the context of infinite economic growth. Assuming a growth rate of 3% per year, he finds it empirically infeasible to achieve "any reductions in aggregate global resource use and reductions in CO2 emissions rapid enough to stay within the carbon budget for 2°C" (p. 873). Strikingly, therefore, the SDGs are rendered impotent by internal contradictions. Hence, degrowth scholars urge us to practically consider worldviews that "break with the anthropocentric and androcentric logic of capitalism, the dominant civilization, … [and] state socialism" models that have led us to this point (Kothari et al., 2014, p. 366). Hickel (2019a) posits that degrowth is the only viable option for survival because efforts to decouple economic growth, material footprint, and energy use are implausible. Our planet cannot sustain infinite growth whilst being sensitive to planetary boundaries.

4. The Sabbatical command

In response to the "wicked problem" of sustainable development, which aims to satisfy present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to do the same, I propose the concept of Sabbath. Before exposing how Sabbath overcomes the internal contradictions that render SDG 1 ineffectual, I will first explore the Hebrew tradition and its Scriptures to ground this analysis in its fundamental conception of Sabbath. From this foundation, I will demonstrate how Sabbath can serve as a practical guide to envisioning a radically alternative future beyond development.

Sabbath, or *Shabbat*, literally translates as *rest* or *completeness*. In the biblical view of reality, the creation story is the point of departure from which all practical iterations of Sabbath flow. As written in Genesis 2:1-3, "following six days of creating the natural world, God rested on the seventh day." Consequently, the subsequent commandments regarding Sabbath rest occur in a rhythmic pattern, with observances every seventh day (*Shabbat*), every seventh year (*Shmita*), and every seventh sabbath year (*Jubilee*). Summarizing Swiss theologian Karl Barth, Angela Carpenter (2018) states that Sabbath rest delimits the scope of human economic activity while evoking a "reflection on the meaning and purpose of work" (p. 77) The iterative nature of Sabbath observance serves as a reminder that human

life is a gift to be lived in peace with God and neighbours, thus orienting work toward communal prosperity. Beyond individual benefits, I argue that the Sabbath establishes a moral foundation to resist structural violence and oppression in three ways: recalibration, rest, and redistribution.

4.1 Recalibration

"Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done." (Genesis 2:1-3, NIV)

According to biblical theology, the culminating purpose of the physical universe is to enter and enjoy God's divine Sabbath rest. From the dawn of creation, rest is the apex and the purpose of all other creative work. When considering the creation saga as narrated in Genesis, creation does not end after day six when humankind is formed. Rather, only after day seven, when God, together with all created realities, enters into Sabbath is the saga declared complete. Sabbath rest is not an afterthought to production; rather, the work of creation was performed *for the sake of the Sabbath*. In sum, according to Judeo-Christian belief, the nature of the universe is teleologically orientated towards Sabbath—the temporal cosmic pause to work and the invitation to celebrate. The Holy seventh day of rest represents the final destiny, the ultimate *telos,* of all creation (Kureethadam, 2015, p. 171). As such, submitting to a weekly Sabbath frustrates and subverts an identity characterized by self-sufficiency, ambition, or greed, by commanding a "recurring interruption" (Carpenter, 2018, p. 89) to human activity. It is resistance against an ideology that values human activity and accomplishment over the humanity of those who toil (Carpenter, 2018).

On Sabbath, we engage in a practice of continual recalibration to defy the engrained epistemologies of contemporary capitalist culture that idolizes work and diminishes human persons. As German theologian Jürgen Moltmann (1985) poignantly notes, in adherence to the Holy Day, "questions about the possibility of 'producing' something, or about utility, are forgotten in the face of the beauty of all created things, which have their meaning simply in their very selves" (p. 285). The Sabbath undeniably restricts the scope of activity for its adherents as a result. Yet, the sacrifice of this decision is ultimately far outweighed by what is gained: an innate identity divorced from economic output and productivity.

4.2 Rest

4.2.1 Social rest

"Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it, you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns." (Exodus 20:8-11, NIV)

A central element of Sabbath that counteracts structural evil is the *communal* observance of a day of rest every seventh day. Sabbath was given in community as a structural commandment to protect from exploitation those who are traditionally silenced, ostracized, or voiceless—the poor, foreigners, animals, and the land. To enter God's

Sabbath rest is to recognize the intricately interwoven natural order of our ecosystem and the myriad of externalities caused by an individual's decisions on the capabilities of other beings and environments.

Jason Storbakken (2021) posits that "Sabbath is among the greatest legislated social revolutions of the ancient world" (p. 5) because it was the sole day designated for slaves and foreigners to rest. When this commandment was granted, the Hebrew people had just experienced liberation from over four hundred years of tyrannical slavery in Egypt. Now, those with scars from the slave drivers' whip, calloused hands from manual labour, and broken spirits from subjugation were guaranteed one day of rest weekly. An interpretation of the Sabbath commandment through a post-enlightenment lens critiques its imposition of constraints upon individual autonomy by mandating a cessation of activities. However, within the sociohistorical framework of pre-capitalist slave societies, the Sabbath was perceived as a beneficent institution that transcended oppressive power dynamics (Storbakken, 2021). Sabbath, thus, is deeply pro-poor. It supersedes the intention of SDG 1—to mandate a minimum income threshold—by rejecting dehumanizing exploitative labour. This comprehensive command empowered those without agency to avail of the same rest freely enjoyed by those with power and privilege; Sabbath is the great leveller.

4.2.2 Ecological rest

"For six years you are to sow your fields and harvest the crops, but during the seventh year let the land lie unplowed and unused. Then the poor among your people may get food from it, and the wild animals may eat what is left." (Exodus 23:10-11b, NIV)

The Sabbath commandment is more than an act of solidarity with marginalized populations. It is also a radical act of environmental justice that introduces a ceiling for extraction to prevent ecological collapse. In the books of Exodus and Leviticus, every seventh year, the Hebrew people were called to observe a Sabbath year or *Shmita* where agricultural activity ceased and the land lay fallow for one year. Catholic scholar Joshtrom Isaac Kureethadam (2015) explains that the Sabbath year is "given to protect the land from relentless exploitation… and to guarantee sustenance for the poor of the land and wild animals" (p. 172). To celebrate the Sabbath rest, thus, is to operate within a paradigm of total sustainability that recognises the interlocking and mutually co-constituted destinies of humans, animals, and our land; to recreate the original peace and harmony associated with the primordial Sabbath of creation.

5. Redistribution

"And you shall hallow the fiftieth year and you shall proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you." (Leviticus 25:10a, NRSV)

The *Jubilee* Year decree is of particular significance in understanding the Sabbath as a structural opposition to social inequity and injustice. As the rhythms of Sabbath progress—from weekly, to every seven years, to every fiftieth year—the momentum builds to a climax of social revolution: the *Jubilee* Year. According to Leviticus 25, the fiftieth year was proclaimed as "God's year of release." It was a time to restore equilibrium, a necessary interruption to systemic abuse. Despite scholars disagreeing on whether the *Jubilee* Year was ever implemented in full, the intended design assured that, by law, debts were erased,

slaves were released, the land was granted a year of recovery, and homes lost to debt were reconciled to the original families (Storbakken, 2021). The *Jubilee* Year signified a radical social transformation where the endemic injustice of the human experience was traded for the restoration of harmony between the environment, humankind, and God. Liberation was not afforded due to merit, virtue, or pity, nor did it require justification according to positivist measurement or rationale. Instead, the release from bondage was a sign of the covenantal relationship between humankind and God.

6. What degrowth seeks, Sabbath finds

Two irreconcilable tensions at the core of the degrowth movement inhibit it from causing systemic change to social structures. First, the degrowth paradigm relies on self-interest as the incentive for collective self-limitations without accounting for the patterns of human nature in the social milieu of capitalist realism. Secondly, degrowth is limited by the internal paradox of relying on radical liberal autonomy and open dialogue as the route to dismantle oppressive power relations. It is my position that degrowth will fail to translate theory into praxis because it relies on moral relativism. The Sabbath rhythms counteract and overcome this problem as an alternative ethical foundation.

6.1 The incentive for self-limitation

The degrowth movement's aspiration for widespread self-limitation, while commendable, confronts a formidable obstacle: the inherent tension between individual desires and the collective good. This dilemma mirrors the historical failures of communist utopias, where the pursuit of communal well-being often clashed with the self-interested tendencies of human nature. Despite the various attempts to suppress, stimulate, or impose "noble" behaviours in socialist communes, "self-interest never ceased to motivate individuals" (Temkin, 1996, p. 35). Moreover, the inability of socialist systems to "provide the necessary incentives" (Temkin, 1996, p. 36) so that self-interested actions aggregated in socially desirable outcomes resulted in inefficiencies and a lack of motivation. Though distinct from communism, degrowth cannot afford to ignore these lessons. I believe that degrowth similarly lacks a potent overarching "incentive" for self-limitation and thus risks falling victim to the same fate as communist utopias.

The degrowth movement justifies restrictions to freedom because it conceives of the good life as a practice of "simplicity, conviviality and frugality" (Asara et al., 2015, p. 378). Degrowth scholars, therefore, assume that self-interest will cause people to surrender freedom autonomously and to establish "limits within which human well-being and creativity can flourish" (Asara et al., 2015, p. 378). However, this assumption relies on a state of the human condition *opposed to* that which facilitates modern Capitalism—an ideology and system of practices which "seamlessly occupies the horizons of the thinkable" (Fisher, 2009, p. 12). According to the philosopher Slavoj Žižek, capitalism can persist only because individuals in society consent to the hypocrisy between our inner subjective beliefs and the beliefs we externalize in our behaviors. Summarizing Žižek, Fisher (2009) claims that our irreconcilable cognitive dissonance is to *feel* empathy for the poor whilst wishing that assistance to them demands no modification to our *actions*. Thus, the foundation of degrowth is rendered impotent as it overlooks the internal contradictory attitude of individuals socialized by the capitalist ideology we inhabit.

In the biblical narrative, however, the debate on free will versus coercion is a non-issue. The active orientation towards God as the external telos offers a clear path to cultivating the right desires and rightful place of self-interest. When discussing freedom in his book *Being Consumed,* William Cavanaugh (2008) argues that "autonomy in the strict sense is simply impossible, for to be independent from others and independent of God is to be cut off from being, and thus to be nothing at all." Moreover, Augustine describes his pre-conversion condition as "no iron chain imposed by anyone else that fettered me, but the iron of my own will" (Saint Augustine, 1997, p. 193). These scholars interpret scriptural freedom as positive freedom; hence, relying on our innate desires to determine our actions is not the path to freedom, but tyrannical subjugation to sin. Thus, the biblical account provides the antidote to the crumbling Enlightenment "logic": true freedom lies not in the unrestrained pursuit of every fleeting desire but in the cultivation of righteous desires.

The degrowth movement, with its critique of free-market-championing democratic capitalism and its call for an economic system rooted in a shared purpose beyond individual desires, shares striking parallels with the biblical worldview. However, it is confined to Western secularism, where individual autonomy and the pursuit of personal fulfilment reign supreme. Thus, the question remains: how can degrowth inspire the collective self-limitation necessary for a sustainable future without a shared moral compass rooted in something beyond human constructs? If degrowth aspires to be a viable solution to the climate crisis, it must acknowledge that this necessitates an active orientation towards an external telos, rather than a reliance on our fallible internal compass.

As the failure of communist utopia attests, we cannot rely on self-interest alone as an individual motivation for self-limitation. A rigorous theoretical foundation is needed as a principal "incentive" for individual choice and for government structures to abandon growth as a policy objective and shift to post-capitalist economic models. Only then may we transition to adopt a pro-poor, pro-environmental paradigm that protects the generations to come and remedies the maladies of existing social inequities.

6.2 The inadequacy of rational deliberation

Degrowth scholars are undoubtably harsh critics of the absolute universalism of neoliberalism. It is ironic therefore that they rely on a radical liberal autonomy to protect this social movement from "heteronomous imperatives and givens" (Asara et al., 2015, p. 233) such as religion, economic laws, bureaucracies, and technocratic institutions. Political scientist Nikos Trantas (2021) states that degrowth aims to form a collective identity by "articulating a plurality of seemingly autonomous and unconnected interests and demands into a coherent hegemonic vision that is collectively forged through *discourse*" (p. 238). Underlying this thought is a blind faith that, given sufficient time, difference and conflict will always be resolved by rational deliberation—through what liberals call "open and inclusive dialogue" (Fish, 1997, p. 391). To determine a dialogue 'rational' is, however, defined in the negative according to those who are excluded from it. The degrowth movement's lack of 'openness' is exemplified in who it deems irrational and, consequently, which perspectives are excluded from the "collective identity" it must forge to bring forth social change.

The 'open' dialogue that degrowth presents fails at two levels. First, in the quest to avoid "givens," degrowth automatically denounces the perspectives of those who hold a deep, unwavering, personal conviction in a "heteronomous [imperative]." Degrowth scholars believe that it is both possible and necessary to demand radical consensus from disparate groups in the "political and collective construction of the meaning of life" (Trantas, 2021, p. 233). Literary theorist Stanley Fish problematises this notion by developing the concept of boutique multiculturalism. According to his framework, total consensus is not possible because the pre-existing beliefs of many individuals are not superficial; rather, these convictions are intrinsic to how people actualise their humanity (Fish, 1997). If one is not willing to have their mind changed through discourse, then the liberal assumption that all conflicts can be resolved through 'talk' collapses. Thus, to ensure the goal of a "coherent hegemonic vision" (Trantas, 2021, p. 238) remains attainable, degrowth scholars must deny access to those who are unwilling to compromise on their conception of the meaning of life—contradicting their fundamental claim of openness.

Secondly, the inherent weakness of relying on open dialogue to overcome social ills is that it overlooks the barriers for historically marginalised populations and does not have a moral basis to justify prioritising one preference over another. Trantas (2021) claims that international sustainable development is a "passive revolution case" (p. 277). He argues that the SDGs enable dominant social classes to execute their hegemonic projects by assimilating just enough "subaltern" priorities to de-radicalise opposition forces. To subvert this hierarchy, the stress in critical degrowth literature is on collective autonomy. Yet, I believe there is a critical lack of reflexivity between this movement's claim to simultaneously combine "seemingly autonomous and unconnected interests" (p. 238) whilst adjudicating between opposing preferences—the subaltern and the elite.

Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci (2021) states that "to a social elite, the components of subaltern groups always have something barbaric and pathological about them" (p. 3). This feature of unequal power relations is overlooked when degrowth scholars consider change. If *contention between* the priorities of the elite—corporations, politicians, the upper class, the coloniser—and the subaltern is what constitutes this relationship, then no amount of discourse can reconcile this tension. When striving towards societal change, knowledge alone is insufficient to bring about transformation: "Each individual has to exercise the will" (Swartz, 2010, p. 26). Yet, granting agency to the subaltern is contrary to the self-interest of the hegemonic elite and beyond the mandate of liberal discussions; hence, the degrowth social movement can neither rely on self-interest nor forging a collective identity through discourse as mechanisms to implement their strategies.

For this reason, degrowth must overcome the central hazard of moral relativism. Moral relativism is based on the belief that if two cultural groups have opposing views of morality, both can be right. Yet, structurally, the subaltern are "subject to the initiative of the dominant class"(Gramsci, 2021, p. 20). Their beliefs are pandered with theoretical legitimacy but negated of any influence. To transcend the competing interests between the elite and the subaltern, theologians contend that we need an "absolute, objective moral standard, outside and above any given society or cultural group" (Cafferky, 2015, p. 45). Degrowth can have lofty ambitions and a pro-poor basis, however, without a systematic philosophical foundation to incentivise the empowerment of subjugated populations, I

believe this social movement is not contentious enough to dismantle existing structures of oppression.

I argue that Sabbath uniquely delivers the missing moral foundation to the degrowth paradigm to justify self-limitation. The Sabbath model functions both as a framework for pragmatic action and as an ethical basis for the "meaning of life" (Asara et al., 2015, p. 377) within this social movement.

The biblical idea of collective self-limitations as the pattern of the good life precedes degrowth. Sabbath is a symbolic phenomenon of rest that emerges from within a state of complete harmony in the creation narrative. "We keep the Sabbath," or self-limit, not primarily to correct social ills or out of self-interested desire, but to acknowledge the rightful value of each person or thing in nature under God. Pope Benedict XVI proffers that ignorance of this relationship besets ecological crisis as the "brutal consumption of creation" commences when "we ourselves are the ultimate measure… where we no longer recognize any claim beyond ourselves"(*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n.d.). Yet, through willing recognition of our existence as contingently embedded in networks of relationships, the Sabbath paradigm deconstructs the individualist pathology at the heart of ecological and social crisis.

Within the biblical ethos, collective self-limitation is founded on a "will-less perception" (Swartz, 2010, p. 26) of others, emulating the original environment of complete harmony within which the Sabbath rest was conceived. This ontological stance towards social existence interacts with German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer's exploration of aesthetic experience. Schopenhauer articulates that when we elevate the needs of others, we contemplate them "no longer conscious of ourselves as individuals" (Swartz, 2010, p. 25). In other words, only when we conceive them "not in relation to ourselves but as products of an Idea, the eternal limitless and timeless God," according to Swartz (2010, p. 25), do they become beautiful—a beauty worthy of dignity, protection, and autonomy. The good life is thus found when we "behold others not as we would want them to be but as they are from the Idea" (p. 25). With our will set aside, we turn away from seeking our own pleasure, "the path of desires," to amplify the synergistic needs of others (p. 26). Therefore, Swartz claims that the Sabbath frees us from the "penal servitude of willing" (p. 26) others to conform to the matrix of our own desires. This freedom from self-interest overcomes the fundamental problem with collective self-limitation as proposed by degrowth scholars—it can never be free from compulsion.

Despite the degrowth paradigm's claims of animosity towards religion and its "givens," many of degrowths practical approaches are synonymous with the ancient biblical texts and the rhythms of Sabbath day, Sabbath year, and the year of jubilee. For example, a well-lobbied strategy within the degrowth social movement is to downscale socially unnecessary and ecologically destructive industries. Degrowth scholars propose to cover consequent employment shortfalls by "shortening the working week… distributing existing income and resources more fairly… [and] improving wages" (Hickel, 2019b, p. 13). These same strategies are mirrored in Carpenter's (2018) operationalisation of communal observance of the Sabbath: "sick leave, a living wage, accommodations for care responsibilities, and reasonable, consistent work schedules" (p. 91). Even the purpose of "[liberating] time from paid work, thus expanding voluntary and convivial activity and autonomy" (Asara et al., 2015, p. 378), is aligned between the degrowth and Sabbath

literature. The important distinction between these claims is that degrowth, unlike Sabbath, promotes welfare reform policies without developing an ethical basis for human identity beyond economic productivity.

Sabbath provides degrowth with the moral foundation to adjudicate between competing interests and structurally contend with the elite interests that pose obstacles to "[putting] life at the center of our economic systems" and "radically [re-evaluating] how much and what work is necessary for a good life for all" (Trantas, 2021, p. 237). As previously discussed, the Sabbath rhythm also recalibrates human identity as biblical theology claims the physical universe is teleologically orientated towards rest. Sabbath calls for sponsoring a system of rest and provides a structural template upon which a communal protest to the absolutism of capitalist realism can rally.

7. Silo thinking

The silo thinking—understood as the hegemonic separation between economics, sociology, and ecology—inherent in SDG strategies is directly antagonistic to the intentions of sustainable development. Applying a post-development lens, scholar Ariel Salleh (2016) contends that silo thinking creates an impasse to holistic progress in two ways. First, it inhibits the transdisciplinary problem-solving necessary to overcome the internal contradictions of the sustainable development agenda (p. 954). Secondly, silo thinking perpetuates conventional Eurocentric dualisms, and their inbuilt hierarchical priorities—deepening the humanity/nature divide. She claims that the dualisms framing the SDG epistemology include "humanity over nature, economy over ecology, capital over labor… North over South, [and] land over water" (p. 956).

Consider global warming in light of these dualisms. To build climate resilience, current schemes rely on abstract market mechanisms and the promise of future technological innovations to rectify global warming trends (Salleh, 2016). Embedded deeply in this theory of change are the hierarchical priorities just mentioned. The nonsensical separation of climate impacts is further exemplified in an exploration of the SGD goals. Goal 1 promotes *economic inclusion* regardless of the threats inherent in a warming climate. Despite their fate being inextricably interwoven, Goal 14 tackles the proper functioning of *water* bodies while Goal 15 protects vegetated ecosystems on *land*. Ironically, how these Goals interact with global warming is muddied even further by their demarcation from Goal 13: *Climate Action*. To Salleh (2016), the "climate is a complex non-linear system" (p. 957). Consequently, we must adopt a position of contention towards these hierarchical priorities if we want to effectively contest political structures.

Sabbath scholars provide a robust framework of contention to challenge silo thinking and the humanity/nature dualism. Kureethadam (2015) organizes the observance of Sabbath according to three interlinked and co-constituted levels involving God, fellow humans and the whole of creation. This triple-level structure seeks to combat the extreme anthropocentrism indicative of the sustainable development discourse in recent history. From the biblical perspective, "the waste of creation begins where we no longer recognize any claim beyond ourselves," where all matter is simply our property (p. 173). Thus, the command for rest, recalibration, and redistribution in Sabbath structurally locates humans as "contingently embedded in networks of relationships with other creatures, and with the Creator" (p. 169). Hence, adhering to a Sabbath aligns with an eco-centric strategy as

lobbied by Salleh (2016). Both secular and biblical scholars agree that the heart of the pathology of ecological crisis is ignorance towards the interaction of natural cycles in the protection of all life on earth. However, Salleh only advances this argument to the point that calls for a paradigm shift *away* from economisation, whilst Kureethadam frames a future paradigm *towards* a tangible solution: a Sabbatical rest for our planet's life-sustaining ecosystems.

8. Proposed practical applications of Sabbatical principles

Within the post-development literature, Sabbath is unexplored. I have argued that Sabbath is a paradigm for social and environmental sustainability and should be adopted as a framework for future degrowth policies. Having considered the theoretical need and ethical basis of Sabbath rhythms, it is now crucial to translate this discussion into practical reflections on what Sabbath observance as a practice of resistance may entail in a contemporary setting. Pragmatic action within this paradigm of rest, recalibration, and redistribution, must first recognise the imbalances of personal agency in exploitative labour across the economic spectrum. Carpenter (2018) regards the exploitation of the low-income worker as "imposed and inescapable" (p. 84). Thus, their Sabbath rest will be most applicable at the community and structural levels of observance. Contrastingly, the "desires and choices" (p. 84) of professional workers are enlisted to "psychologically [form]" (p. 85) willing collusion in the effort to exploit their labour. Thus, for those who possess autonomy, the individual level of Sabbath observance allows for self-imposed regulation. In recognition of the pluralistic interaction between social class and social hegemony, it is evident that resisting the co-opting of time extends beyond individual Sabbath observance. Thus, I will now explore a triple-level framework of Sabbath applications that are sensitive to such power relations: (1) at the individual level, (2) at the interpersonal or community level, and (3) at the structural level. Then, I will propose how these multi-level applications are fundamentally pathways to environmental justice, able to bridge the intentions of international agreements—like COP15's Global Biodiversity Framework and the Paris Agreement—and local-level actions.

8.1 Individual level

Applications of Sabbath at the prescriptive individual level do not necessarily apply to all. As mentioned, the poor and marginalised do not possess the agential capacity to choose between rest and exploitative labour; hence, Sabbath practices to empower these individuals will result from the second and third levels of application. Nonetheless, the future of sustainable social development and environmental protection relies on a recalibration of human identity beyond economic production and cognition of interlocking relations within individual decision-making. Thus, for those who possess the influence and privilege of capacity for choice, we must be challenged to alter our current habits.

By using Iris Marion Young's (2006) global responsibility framework, we can each individually consider how our actions impact and exploit our other human persons and the environment: internationally, nationally, and locally. When we perceive our actions as embedded within contingent networks of relationships, our choice to engage in a periodic interruption to consumption and production is a practice of resistance. Putting our will

aside limits the demands of our desires on other's labour and time. For example, to freely invoke the template of a weekly 24-hour Sabbatical rest means transferring 14.29% of potential productive time to non-activity. This restriction facilitates the rest of humanity and nature, disaggregates our human identity from our relationship to production, and permits agency for "autonomous meta-industrial" (Salleh, 2016, p. 954) labour—work that is designed, directed, and carried out on one's terms.

According to current literature, no nation has implemented Sabbath principles as explicit public policy. Thus, it is difficult to analyse the potential impacts of individual sabbatical observance on a large population. However, past research on small cohort sizes found that incorporating structured time for relaxation and rejuvenation into one's routine may promote better mental health outcomes and overall quality of life. Participants who were educated on the advantages of Sabbath-keeping and practised it weekly showed improvements in anxiety, stress, and overall well-being over 8 weeks (McNichol, 2022). These findings suggest that regular periods of rest and reflection can lead to reduced anxiety symptoms, lower stress levels, and enhanced psychological well-being. Sabbath is proposed to improve mental health through four mechanisms: (1) counteracting physical and psychological stress resulting from an overemphasis on work, (2) improving the sense of agential capacity to direct one's life, (3) developing a natural rhythm to one's week, and (4) deeper relational connections (Speedling, 2016).

8.2 Community level

The Sabbath rhythms necessarily interact with factors at the interpersonal and community level. "Not only is Sabbath given to the community, but ultimately it will be authentically observed only if it is practised together rather than by each person in isolation" (Carpenter, 2018, p. 91). During a weekly Sabbath, one can personally rest from travel, buying things, or creating household chores for others; however, deeper relations of injustice exist that need social interaction to be remedied. By framing the practical applications of Sabbath within the matrix of community we realise that considerations should be made within the locale of group dynamics, rather than at the individual level. For example, schools, households, workplaces, or neighbourhoods must trigger a participatory process to lay down a baseline of self-limitation that is contextually meaningful.

From this understanding, Carpenter (2018) grounds Sabbath as a source of "communal protest"(p. 90). Communal observance of the Sabbath includes advocacy and support for basic workers' rights, a living wage, and regular and reasonable work schedules, *and against* extractivism, environmental degradation, and greenhouse gas emissions. In many cases, this shift will require a redistribution of agency and resources where the privileged must consume less and willingly sacrifice comfort. Making such swift and substantial changes might appear challenging at first glance. However, history provides numerous instances of reforms resulting from a rising social consensus about their adverse impact on society or the environment. The implementation of child labour laws, restrictions on single-use plastics, and the civil rights movement in North America exemplify how a shift in social norms preceded revisions to public policy. These reforms, despite empowering individuals, do not dissociate human identity from work or mass consumerism. Sabbath-keeping provides both a conceptual template for aggregate action,

spurred by the degrowth social movement, *and* the moral foundation for the necessary redistribution.

8.3 Structural level

I have argued that the quest for the chimaera of "sustainable development" is systemically corrupted by two social realities: unbridled human egoism and Western humanity/nature dualism. The cognitive dissonance between simultaneously ravishing the earth for human development and fighting climate change reveals our need for structural intervention. Sabbath observance is primarily "designed as a structural constraint on selfishness" (Cafferky, 2015, p. 42) which, over time, I believe has the power to gradually supplant our current self-defeating strategies. The Sabbatical mandate to provide for the poor and care for the earth necessarily places constraints on economic development and environmental burdens. As the Sabbath rhythm develops toward the *Shmita* and *Jubilee* Year the rights and protections of vulnerable groups and the earth are expanded into full structural liberation.

At a structural level, reimagining the Sabbatical and *Jubilee* principles promotes social policies that limit wealth acquisition and prioritize communal well-being over relentless productivity. Implementing these principles involves challenging the prevailing 24/7 work culture and advocating for systemic changes that ensure genuine Sabbath rest is accessible to all, not just the privileged few (Carpenter, 2018).

Structural Sabbath policies also align with the call to action found in SDG 15: *Life on Land* which seeks to protect the sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems. For example, a structural policy based on the *Shmita* principle would encourage sustainable land management practices for the long-term health and viability of agricultural systems. This could involve implementing a mandatory rotation of fallow periods for agricultural land on a national or regional scale. Governments could enact legislation requiring farmers to leave a certain percentage of their land fallow each year, rotating the fallow periods to ensure that all land receives adequate rest and regeneration over time. Additionally, governments could provide support and incentives for sustainable farming practices during *Shmita* years, such as organic farming, agroforestry, or soil regeneration techniques. Ultimately, embracing Sabbath principles entails not only relinquishing excessive productivity but also gaining a deeper appreciation for the intrinsic need for rest in healthy social and environmental systems.

The Sabbath framework also challenges the hegemonic economic ideology of our international order and reimagines the standard capitalist measurement of global poverty. Commodification is widely recognized as a distinctive feature of the global neoliberal project. Activist David McNally (2006) defines this social process as the "idea that every single conceivable good and service under the sun should be turned into a marketable item"(p. 39). Adams et al. (2019) further conceptualise this phenomenon in the "economisation of life" (p. 1388); whereby, the incentive to achieve social good hinges on its relevance to the horizon of the national economy. They posit that the universal assumption to conceive, implement, and evaluate interventions based on econometrics justifies public investment as the acceleration of new populations into the market economy. As such, measurement is neither neutral nor objective; rather, without critical

reflection, it reproduces the system of hegemony within which it operates—in this case, rescripting vulnerable populations as potential emerging markets.

The Sabbath paradigm directly confronts this value system by recalibrating human identity as separate from economic productivity. Embedded in the theory of the Sabbath are humanity's interlinkage with nature and an understanding of poverty as a form of structural violence, disempowerment, and injustice. Thus, I suggest that the Sabbath is a counterhegemonic paradigm that critiques current forms of measuring poverty alleviation as indicators that commodify created beings. This critical stance allows us to unpack the meaning of social good at a structural and ideological level—and subsequently revise how we measure benefit. As degrowth is at the core of Sabbath policies, this revision will mean delinking the concept of linear GDP growth and development. I posit instead that "progress" is the communal journey towards a structural implementation of rest, redistribution, and recalibration, at multiple levels, for the land, animals, and humans.

8.4 A Sabbatical framework for environmental justice policies

As our planet grapples with the sixth mass (Holocene) extinction—a distinct period of geological time where a large percentage of biodiversity is *disappearing due to human activity (WWF, n.d.)*—the urgency to implement comprehensive environmental protections is undeniable. The United Nations Environment Programme states that species are disappearing at an alarming rate, "hundreds, or even thousands, of times faster than the natural background rate of extinction" (UNEP, 2020). In response to this crisis, the Global Biodiversity Framework was created at COP15 in 2022, outlining a series of ambitious international targets such as the "restoration of 30 per cent of terrestrial and marine ecosystems" (UNEP, 2022). Similarly, the 2016 Paris Agreement is an international treaty that legally binds 196 nations to tackle global warming by "limit[ing] the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels" (UNFCCC, n.d.) However, evident from the failures in SDGs progress, international agreements do not inevitably stimulate meaningful actions. I argue that the Sabbath is one stewardship model that can unite and scale up the current patchwork of local-level actions by fostering solidarity between interconnected issues. By incorporating these Sabbath principles: 1) equitable redistribution, 2) ecosystem restoration, and 3) rest and recalibration, policymakers can bridge the gap between international agreements and on-the-ground efforts.

Equitable distribution and restrained consumption of the Earth's resources is a core tenet of the Sabbatical laws. Modern policies can reflect this principle by promoting community-based resource management systems[1] such as community-owned renewable energy projects. One shining example of this is Hepburn Energy, Australia's first community-owned wind farm. This project has not only generated enough clean energy to power over 2,000 homes (Hepburn Energy, 2022), but has also fostered local economic development, creating jobs, and returning over $30,000 a year to a local Community Sustainability Fund (IHRB, 2022). Such initiatives showcase the potential of community ownership to democratize access to resources, promote a more equitable and sustainable development model, and reduce reliance on large, centralized energy providers.

[1] Additional examples include community-supported agriculture (CSA) (Silverberg, 2020), community forests (Friends of the Earth International, n.d.), or community seed banks (CTDT Zambia, 2023).

The Sabbath practice of allowing the land to lie fallow resonates deeply with the Global Biodiversity Framework's 30% restoration target. A Sabbath-inspired policy could mandate periodic "rest" phases for heavily exploited ecosystems, such as overfished fisheries or degraded forests, allowing them to regenerate. Iceland offers a compelling example of how such policies can yield remarkable results. In the face of dwindling fish stocks, Iceland implemented a system of Individual Transferable Quotas (ITQs) in the 1980s, effectively limiting the total allowable catch and allocating shares to individual fishers (Johannsson, 2020). This system, combined with strict enforcement and scientific monitoring, led to a remarkable recovery of key fish populations—peaking in the 2000s, the haddock population grew seventeen times larger than in the 1980s (Jakobsen, 2020)—demonstrating the power of regulated rest in marine ecosystems. Other successful examples that provide breathing room for ecosystems to rebound include rotational grazing in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed which benefitted water quality while increasing soil carbon sequestration (Mountains to Bay Alliance, n.d.), and the establishment of wildlife corridors like the Yellowstone to Yukon conservation initiative that safeguards wildlife migration (Holterman et al., 2023). The designation of national "restoration days" could further encourage volunteer participation in activities like tree planting, invasive species removal, and habitat restoration—simultaneously fostering a sense of collective responsibility toward the environment. These steps institutionalize space and time for nature to replenish itself, mirroring the Sabbath's provision for human rejuvenation.

The rest and recalibration of the human identity found in the Sabbath command also offer a profound template for curbing carbon emissions. Implementing policies that designate specific days for reduced industrial activity and limited non-essential transportation would tangibly reduce greenhouse gas emissions. For example, "Carbon Sabbath" days where individuals prioritize low-carbon activities such as walking, cycling, or utilizing public transportation, could foster a culture of mindful consumption and environmental awareness. Additionally, municipal investment in local community engagement and non-material pursuits, as promoted in Sabbath activities, could champion sustainable leisure and discourage carbon-intensive entertainment options. Empirical evidence supports the efficacy of such community-centric approaches. For example, Denmark drastically reduced citizens' carbon footprint by creating eco-villages. These municipally-funded programs emphasized community gardens, bike-sharing initiatives, shared green spaces, and pedestrian-friendly zones and have resulted in substantial reductions in carbon emissions—a 20% per capita in some municipalities (Nielsen-Englyst & Gausset, 2024). As the Sabbath recalibrates human identity, these efforts, too, cultivate a sense of community and value activities beyond their productive capacity. The success of this initiative underscores the power of community-driven, sustainable practices in mitigating climate change.

In these ways, policymakers and grassroots organizations can galvanize substantive local action harmonious with global climate commitments. As evidenced by successful models like Denmark, grassroots initiatives possess the capacity to not only curtail carbon footprints but also enrich the overall quality of life. In sum, the Sabbath offers a blueprint capable of amplifying and consolidating the current patchwork of disparate local-level efforts into a unified and potent global drive toward a viable future planet.

9. The limitations and possibilities of secular application

My motivation for introducing Sabbath into the Sustainable Development Goals discourse stems from a desire to broaden the pre-existing dialogue and expose the internal contradictions within prevailing development paradigms. I recognise, however, that challenging the relentless pursuit of growth and consumption will face significant structural hurdles from megacorporations for whom unfettered consumerism creates inordinate profits. In 2021, Apple wielded an estimated value of over $2 trillion; meaning Apple's market capitalization surpasses 96% of countries GDPs (Wallach, 2021). Similarly, if Microsoft was a country, it would again be one of the richest nations with a GDP above that of countries like Canada, Russia and Brazil (Wallach, 2021). Resistance to the undemocratic concentration of power in global corporations must be a form of internationally connected, sustained, bottom-up solidarity—as promoted in Sabbath praxis. Otherwise, we will be caught in the quagmire of fighting corporations with more economic leveraging power than most sovereign nation-states.

While the Sabbatical model presents a compelling framework for environmental justice and sustainable living, its practical applicability outside of faith communities raises significant questions. The Sabbath is a commandment given to the community of faith: concretely, the church or the synagogue. Karl Barth, a theologian renowned for his emphasis on the particularity of Christian revelation, questions whether it is viable to insist on its application beyond its intended habitation within a scriptural and theological framework. For Barth, the "comprehensive content" of the Sabbath command is what he terms a "renunciating faith" in God which surrenders in totality one's thoughts, ambitions, and actions (Carpenter, 2018, p. 88). Without this kind of faith, the Sabbath command is gutted of its intention to recognise gospel rest as the initial context for human activity.

Translating a deeply theological concept like the Sabbath into secular terms risks alienation from those unfamiliar with or opposed to its scriptural and historical context. Advocating for legislated rest can evoke concerns about imposing religious practices on a pluralistic society, a dynamic that echoes the problematic history of enforced religious observance. However, interesting synergies exist between religious observance and secular desire. One example is the landmark 1961 US Supreme Court case *McGowan v. Maryland* which addressed the constitutionality of "blue laws"—laws restricting certain activities on Sundays. While acknowledging the historical religious underpinnings of such laws, the Court ultimately upheld them, emphasizing their evolved secular purpose of providing a uniform day of "rest and recreation" (Vile, 2024). This nuanced ruling underscores the complex interplay between religious freedom, secular interests, and the potential for societal benefit and acceptability despite monotheistic origins.

However, the transformative potential of Sabbath, even when embraced from a secular perspective, cannot be entirely dismissed. As understood in the biblical narrative, creation is inherently oriented towards rhythms of interruption, thus, perhaps even self-interested observance of rest can yield beneficial outcomes. Even Karl Barth acknowledges the potential for Sabbatical principles to serve the common good. For example, to combat historically exploitative labour practices, he claims that "Sabbath legislation might indeed be needed to protect against the compulsion of some workers by others who require their services" (Carpenter, 2018, p. 87). Therefore, Barth advocates that true Sabbath

observance transcends traditional Sunday rest to support social structures that afford all community members the same responsibility and freedom before God. This suggests that even within a secular framework, the Sabbath's call to resist the commodification of time can inspire social reforms that promote human flourishing and dignity.

Barriers to directly imposing Sabbatical principles on a secular world will persist. I believe, however, that the global Church is primarily responsible for championing environmental justice in the Anthropocene. The Church possesses a unique platform to trigger widespread social reform in a context that inherently recognises the Sabbath as a profound gift and commandment. At 2.18 billion people, Christians comprised nearly one-third of the global population in 2010 (PEW, 2011). Moreover, Christians possess a historical track record of spearheading social justice movements For example, Wilberforce's fight to abolish slavery, Dietrich Bonhoeffer's stand against Nazism, and Martin Luther King Jr.'s leadership in the US civil rights movement (Brooks, 2021). The vast network of Christian communities presents a fertile ground for fostering awareness, inspiring action, and advocating for policies that align with Sabbatical principles. Although instigating a successful collective action campaign may seem daunting, the engagement threshold touted to eventuate change is lower than one might think—a reasonable 3.5% of the population (Robson, 2019). If every local church community engaged in the praxis of Sabbath principles, then participation would overwhelmingly exceed this critical mass. Rather than relying on political will and momentum to absolve individual conviction to obey this commandment, it is fundamental that the Church bears witness to a way of life that is both fulfilling and environmentally responsible.

It remains that the Sabbath's full richness and transformative power is most fully experienced within the context of faith, yet these principles still offer valuable insights for secular society. Implementing these values will require careful consideration of the practical trade-offs and potential for cultural resistance. I recommend pilot programs and further research be conducted at multiple levels to build social acceptability and explore how Sabbatical values can be effectively integrated into modern life. To protect against the hegemonic and paternalistic policies of eras gone by, development policies that seek to integrate Sabbatical principles must emphasize community-led initiatives that elevate Indigenous and historically marginalized populations in decision-making spaces.

10. Conclusion

The current trajectory of global development, as encapsulated in the Sustainable Development Goals, faces significant challenges and internal contradictions. Despite the political momentum surrounding the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the halfway point assessment reveals glaring shortcomings and a grim lack of progress, particularly in eradicating poverty. The growth-centric paradigm underlying SDG 1, aimed at ending poverty, is fundamentally flawed and impractical, as it relies on unsustainable economic expansion. Moreover, the silo thinking inherent in SDG strategies perpetuates dualisms that hinder holistic progress and fail to address interconnected challenges such as climate change.

To navigate beyond these limitations, a paradigm shift is imperative, one that challenges the entrenched ideologies of capitalist realism and embraces a radically alternative future. While degrowth offers a critique of relentless economic growth, it falls

short in providing a robust moral foundation for systemic change, as it relies heavily on self-interest as a motivator for collective action. For this reason, degrowth is plagued by the same defects experienced by socialist utopias throughout history.

In contrast, Sabbath emerges as a promising alternative, offering both a pragmatic framework for action and an ethical basis rooted in collective self-limitation and interconnectedness with nature. The Church is the custodian of the Sabbath tradition; thus, it bears a unique responsibility to advocate for environmental justice, enact Sabbath practices, and exemplify rest. Nonetheless, within the secular society, Sabbath principles can inspire policymakers and communities to find solidarity between local actions and extra-local problems. Future research must attempt to create concrete models where Sabbath ideals are incorporated at the individual, community, and structural levels. In reconfiguring the ultimate goals driving "progress," societies shall challenge the prevailing 24/7 work culture, prioritize communal well-being over productivity, and foster genuine rest and rejuvenation for humans, animals, and the land.

Ensuring a viable planet requires a re-evaluation of economic paradigms and a profound shift in the Western definition of freedom. By embracing the Sabbath as a guiding principle, we can reimagine a future that appreciates the co-constituted well-being of humanity and the planet, transcending the confines of capitalist realism and fostering a more equitable and sustainable world for generations to come.

Acknowledgment: The author declares no competing interests.

References

Adams, V., Behague, D., Caduff, C., Löwy, I., & Ortega, F. (2019). Re-imagining global health through social medicine. *Global Public Health*, *14*(10), 1383–1400. https://doi.org/10.1080/17441692.2019.1587639

Asara, V., Otero, I., Demaria, F., & Corbera, E. (2015). Socially sustainable degrowth as a social–ecological transformation: Repoliticizing sustainability. *Sustainability Science*, *10*(3), 375–384. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-015-0321-9

Brooks, D. (2021, March 18). Opinion | A Christian Vision of Social Justice. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/18/opinion/social-justice-christianity.html

Cafferky, M. E. (2015). Sabbath: The Theological Roots of Sustainable Development. *Journal of Biblical Integration in Business*, *18*(1). https://cbfa-jbib.org/index.php/jbib/article/view/108

Carpenter, A. (2018). Exploitative Labor, Victimized Families, and the Promise of the Sabbath. *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics*, *38*(1), 77–94.

Catechism of the Catholic Church. (n.d.). Retrieved 11 March 2024, from https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM

Cavanaugh, W. (2008). *Being Consumed*. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. https://www.eerdmans.com/9781467438292/being-consumed/

CTDT Zambia. (2023). *Seeds of Resilience; Community Seed Banks*. CTDT Zambia. https://www.ctdtzambia.com/post/seeds-of-resilience-community-seed-banks

Davis, S. (2023). *Bioenergy Carbon Capture & Storage Isn't That Green*. Dogwood Alliance. https://dogwoodalliance.org/2023/08/beccs-bioenergy-carbon-capture-storage-is-not-green/

Fish, S. (1997). Boutique Multiculturalism, or Why Liberals Are Incapable of Thinking about Hate Speech. *Critical Inquiry*, *23*(2), 378–395. https://doi.org/10.1086/448833

Fisher, M. (2009). *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* John Hunt Publishing.

Friends of the Earth International. (n.d.). *Community forest management—Friends of the Earth International* [Friends of the Earth International]. Retrieved 11 August 2024, from https://www.foei.org/what-we-do/forests-and-biodiversity/community-forest-management/

Fuso Nerini, F., Mazzucato, M., Rockström, J., van Asselt, H., Hall, J. W., Matos, S., Persson, Å., Sovacool, B., Vinuesa, R., & Sachs, J. (2024). Extending the Sustainable Development Goals to 2050—A road map. *Nature*, *630*(8017), 555–558. https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-024-01754-6

Gramsci, A. (2021). Subaltern Social Groups: A Critical Edition of Prison Notebook 25. In *Subaltern Social Groups*. Columbia University Press. https://doi.org/10.7312/gram19038

Hepburn Energy. (2022). *Co-operative | About*. Hepburn Energy. https://www.hepburnenergy.coop/about/

Hickel, J. (2015). *The Problem with Saving the World*. Jackobin. https://jacobin.com/2015/08/global-poverty-climate-change-sdgs/

Hickel, J. (2019a). Is it possible to achieve a good life for all within planetary boundaries? *Third World Quarterly*, *40*(1), 18–35. https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2018.1535895

Hickel, J. (2019b). The contradiction of the sustainable development goals: Growth versus ecology on a finite planet. *Sustainable Development*, *27*(5), 873–884. https://doi.org/10.1002/sd.1947

Holterman, D., Wright, P., & Jacob, A. (2023). Advancing Evidence-Based Decision-Making in Large Landscape Conservation Through the Social Sciences: A Research Agenda for the Yellowstone to Yukon Region. *Mountain Research and Development*, *43*(4), A1–A10. https://doi.org/10.1659/mrd.2023.00008

IHRB. (2022). *What is Community Ownership for Renewable Energy?* Institute for Human Rights and Business. https://www.ihrb.org/explainers/what-is-community-ownership-for-renewable-energy

Jakobsen, A. (2020). *Cod and haddock populations have multiplied over past 20 years*. Institute of Marine Research. https://www.hi.no/en/hi/news/2020/october-1/cod-and-haddock-populations-have-multiplied-over-past-20-years

Johannsson, S. I. (2020). *Case Study: Individual Transferable Quotas for Cod Fisheries, Iceland (on-going)*. The Commonwealth. https://thecommonwealth.org/case-study/case-study-individual-transferable-quotas-cod-fisheries-iceland-going

Kothari, A., Demaria, F., & Acosta, A. (2014). Buen Vivir, Degrowth and Ecological Swaraj: Alternatives to sustainable development and the Green Economy. *Development*, *57*(3–4), 362–375. https://doi.org/10.1057/dev.2015.24

Kureethadam, J. I. (2015). Conservation of Our Planetary Home. The "Sabbath" as an appropriate paradigm for total sustainability. *Conservation Science in Cultural Heritage*, *15*, 165–190. https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1973-9494/6175

McNally, D. (2006). Two. The Commodity Status of Labour: The Secret of Commodified Life. In *Two. The Commodity Status of Labour: The Secret of Commodified Life* (pp. 39–54). University of Toronto Press. https://doi.org/10.3138/9781442603172-004

McNichol, K. (2022). *Sabbath-keeping and Mental Health: The Influence of Weekly Sabbath-keeping on Stress,*. https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/doctoral/3564/

Moltmann, J. (1985). *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God*. Harper & Row.

Mountains to Bay Grazing Alliance. (n.d.). *Promoting Rotational Grazing in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed and Quantifying the Environmental Benefits: Results for Six Case Study Farms*. Chesapeake Bay Foundation. https://m2balliance.org/documents/report_grazing-case-study.pdf

National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2019). Bioenergy with Carbon Capture and Sequestration. In *Negative Emissions Technologies and Reliable Sequestration: A Research Agenda*. National Academies Press (US). https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK541444/

Nielsen-Englyst, C., & Gausset, Q. (2024). From countercultural ecovillages to mainstream green neighbourhoods—A view on current trends in Denmark. *Npj Climate Action*, *3*(1), 1–6. https://doi.org/10.1038/s44168-024-00140-2

PEW. (2011). Global Christianity – A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World's Christian Population. *Pew Research Center*. https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2011/12/19/global-christianity-exec/

Potter, B. (2023). Why Does Nuclear Power Plant Construction Cost So Much? *Institute for Progress*. https://ifp.org/nuclear-power-plant-construction-costs/

Raworth, K. (2012). *A safe and just space for humanity CAN WE LIVE WITHIN THE DOUGHNUT?* Oxfam GB. https://doi.org/10.1163/2210-7975_HRD-9824-0069

Robson, D. (2019, May 13). *The '3.5% rule': How a small minority can change the world*. BBC. https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20190513-it-only-takes-35-of-people-to-change-the-world

Saint Augustine. (1997). BOOK VIII: Conversion. In *The Confessions*. New City Press. https://www1.villanova.edu/dam/villanova/mission/mission---ministry/Pilgrimage/further-reading/Confessions,%20Book%20VIII.pdf

Saito, K. (2023). *Kohei Saito: "Degrowth needs to learn from communism"*. Green European Journal. https://www.greeneuropeanjournal.eu/kohei-saito-degrowth-needs-to-learn-from-communism/

Saito, K. (2024). *Slow Down: The Degrowth Manifesto*. Astra Publishing House. https://www.harvard.com/book/slow_down/

Salleh, A. (2016). Climate, Water, and Livelihood Skills: A Post-Development Reading of the SDGs. *Globalizations*, *13*(6), 952–959. https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2016.1173375

Schneider E.C., Chin M.H., Graham G.N., Lopez L., Obuobi S., Sequist T.D., & McGlynn E.A. (2021). Increasing Equity While Improving the Quality of Care: JACC Focus Seminar 9/9. *Journal of the American College of Cardiology*, *78*(25), 2599–2611. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jacc.2021.06.057

Silverberg, M. (2020). *The Ins and Outs of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)*. Jefferson County Colorado Public Health. https://stories.opengov.com/jeffersoncountyco/published/qvMWVPWcC

Speedling, B. B. (2016). Celebrating Sabbath: An Organic Inquiry into the Transformative Power of a Sanctuary in Time. *St.Catherine University*, *Holistic Health Studies*. https://sophia.stkate.edu/ma_hhs/5

Spence, A., Poortinga, W., Pidgeon, N., & Lorenzoni, I. (2010). Public Perceptions of Energy Choices: The Influence of Beliefs about Climate Change and the Environment. *Energy & Environment*, *21*(5), 385–407. https://doi.org/10.1260/0958-305X.21.5.385

Storbakken, J. A. (2021). *A Liberation Theology of Sabbath* [Ph.D., Boston University School of Theology]. https://www.proquest.com/docview/2496540808/abstract/1D37826981D54CA3PQ/1

Swartz, M. E. N. (2010). Restoring and holding on to beauty: The role of aesthetic relational values in sustainable development. *Stellenbosch University*, 499.

Temkin, G. (1996). Information and Motivation: Reflections on the Failure of the Socialist Economic System. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, *29*(1), 25–41.

The World Bank. (2022). *Poverty and Shared Prosperity 2022: Correcting Course*. https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/b96b361a-a806-5567-8e8a-b14392e11fa0/content

Trantas, N. (2021). Could 'degrowth' have the same fate as 'sustainable development'? A discussion on passive revolution in the Anthropocene age. *Journal of Political Ecology*, *28*(1). https://doi.org/10.2458/jpe.2362

UNEP. (2020). *UNEP and Biodiversity | UN Environment Programme*. https://www.unep.org/unep-and-biodiversity

UNEP. (2022). *COP15 ends with landmark biodiversity agreement*. UN Environment Programme. https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/cop15-ends-landmark-biodiversity-agreement

UNFCCC. (n.d.). *The Paris Agreement*. United Nations Climate Change. Retrieved 11 August 2024, from https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement

United Nations Statistics Division. (2024). *SDG Indicators*. https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2023/progress-midpoint/

Vile, J. R. (2024). *McGowan v. Maryland (1961)*. The Free Speech Center. https://firstamendment.mtsu.edu/article/mcgowan-v-maryland/

Wallach, O. (2021). *The World's Tech Giants, Compared to the Size of Economies*. Visual Capitalist. https://www.visualcapitalist.com/the-tech-giants-worth-compared-economies-countries/

Woodward, D. (2015). *Incrementum ad Absurdum: Global Growth, Inequality and Poverty Eradication in a Carbon-Constrained World*.

WWF. (n.d.). *What is the sixth mass extinction and what can we do about it?* World Wildlife Fund. Retrieved 11 August 2024, from https://www.worldwildlife.org/stories/what-is-the-sixth-mass-extinction-and-what-can-we-do-about-it

Young, I. M. (2006). *RESPONSIBILITY AND GLOBAL JUSTICE: A SOCIAL CONNECTION MODEL*. Cambridge University Press. https://www-cambridge-org.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/core/journals/social-philosophy-and-policy/article/responsibility-and-global-justice-a-social-connection-model/9308EE478561C7CE31E1F5A8F26CBE04