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Political Geography

journal homepage: <http://www.elsevier.com/locate/polgeo>

Revolutionary humility: Response to Gómez-Baggethun

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I am deeply grateful for Erik Gómez-Baggethun's thoughtful comments on my recent plenary concerning modernity, degrowth, and political ecology. There is a great deal to chew on here, especially with regard to the way the degrowth community *attempts* to thread the needle between ethical limits and Malthusian scarcity; I will continue to read their work to better understand this position (Kallis, 2019).

As may not be clear from Gómez-Baggethun's characterization of my argument, I also share with my brothers and sisters in the degrowth community all of the concerns of untethered capitalist expansion through technological "innovation"; none of us believe that monopoly control of genetic and chemical innovation laying with multinational firms (e.g. Bayer) can be anything but pernicious. So too, I continue to advocate for alternative economies, in the tradition of Gibson-Graham (Gibson-Graham, 2006) and Ashish Kothari (Kothari and Joy 2017); experiments in economic conviviality are most welcome (e.g. Snyder and St. Martin 2015).

But the notion that the major technical innovations of the 21st century are, and will be, the ruin of humanity and the Earth, is where we part company. I am far less sanguine than Gómez-Baggethun that degrowth theorists and practitioners (or anyone, really) have sufficient knowledge *a priori*, to determine which forms of technology should be accepted or denied to/by working people. Nowhere, moreover, have I promised "miracles", as Gómez-Baggethun insists. Rather, I advocate the humility to listen to producers as they navigate the complexities of actually-existing economies, and the willingness to strive for political and economic configurations in which ever-inventive people can thrive.

Farmers will be editing genes and employing robots whether Gómez-Baggethun approves or not. The question is: what configuration of land rights, redistributive mechanisms, regulatory controls, and non-capitalist relations will make that fact one that nurtures, rather than erodes, ecosystems, communities, and socially just outcomes? The answer to that question can only be determined through rigorous political ecology, probably best informed by committed ecological feminism (Gibson-Graham, 2011; Haraway, 1991).

I regret only that we had no opportunity to hear from advocates for ecomodernity, who, I wager, would be equally dissatisfied with my assessment of the state of discourse in this field. If I have troubled absolutists, then my work here is done.

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DOI of original article: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2019.04.010>.E-mail address: pfrobbins@wisc.edu.<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2019.102099>

Received 11 October 2019; Accepted 12 October 2019

Available online 24 October 2019

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