

Kallis, G. 2019. *Limits: why Malthus was wrong and why environmentalists should care*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. Paper ISBN: 9781503611559, Digital ISBN: 9781503611566; US \$14.

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Giorgos Kallis, the author of *Limits: why Malthus was wrong and why environmentalists should care* (2019) defines himself as a political ecologist, and an ecological economist. This book follows from his collection of opinion essays *In defense of degrowth* (2017) and *Degrowth* (2018), as well as three co-edited volumes and numerous articles. In *Limits*, Kallis pushes against the notions of 'scarcity' and 'limits', the cornerstone of classical and neo-classical economics, and argues that "it is only when we begin to accept the world as abundant that we can contemplate limiting our wants and delimiting a safe space for our freedom" (p.4). Economists, and also environmentalists, have based their concerns on the clash between a limited world and unlimited wants. However, the author argues, the idea that human beings are creatures of unlimited wants was a theoretical creation of Malthus, not a factual reality. Recognizing this, Kallis tells us, allows for a radical critique of growth that addresses inequality and environmental needs, one that centers societal self-imposed limits in a planet perceived to be abundant. Kallis traces the birth of the modern notion of limits in classical economics, its transformation in neo-classical economics, and contrasts such perspectives with anarcha-feminism and romanticism. He then criticizes the concept of limits as used within the environmentalist movement to propose an opposing view of the world as one of planetary abundance and balance, in which self-limitation should be observed. He presents classical Greek society as one of limits, and explores the tensions inherent in his theory of abundance. After five chapters, the book closes with a reinvigorated call to set limits for ourselves.

In chapter one, 'Why Malthus was wrong', Kallis argues that both supporters of Malthus's work and his detractors have discussed his explanations without fully interrogating his questions or his premises. Therefore, Kallis summarizes the *Essay on the principle of population* (Malthus 1798) with two notions. The **first** one is that humanity's reproduction capacities are always greater than its capacity to sustain itself. The **second** of Malthus's principles was, according to Kallis, scarcity: later the foundation for *homo economicus*. According to Kallis, "Malthus was not an advocate of limits, but someone who invoked the specter of limits to justify inequality and call for growth" (p.16). Kallis disputes the popular view that Malthus promoted birth control and, on the contrary, he measured the wealth of a nation by the size of its population. In Kallis's view, poverty, famine, and disease were accepted as an outcome of Malthus's first principle, which in turn naturalized the need for *unlimited* and technological growth to overcome these negative effects. Malthus, an Anglican cleric, wrote the first version of his *Essay* to combat any form of social welfare (in his case, the English Poor Laws) (Malthus 1798). To answer his own question about why Malthus was wrong, Kallis states that it was because Malthus opposed the idea of redistribution of wealth, welfare to the poor, and (sexual) gratification for *everyone*.

Chapter 2, 'Economics: scarcity without limits', follows the trajectory of the debate over scarcity and *homo economicus* in the 20th century. Kallis claims that neoclassical economists, starting with Lionel Robbins in 1932, translated Malthus's expectation of humanity's desire to reproduce without restraint, into assumptions that there were also unlimited desires to consume and possess goods. They also argued that time became a limiting factor in modern society. Kallis suggests that this is the moment when (Western capitalist) society developed a view of life as unaffected by changes in external constraints - but still, this created worry that choosing something mean losing out of something else (another feature of modern life). To accept this, Kallis cautions, is to give in to the illusion that we cannot be content doing one thing at a time. He argues that the frenzy of modern capitalist life is a *result* of the neo-classical economic model and not the reverse; in it, only scarcity knows no limits (p.37). Kallis argues that neo-Malthusian environmentalists reinforce a neo-classical logic when they invoke the idea of a limited world, but they do not question the unboundedness of our wants, which is a human characteristic that he disputes. On the contrary, the author argues, in the same sense that people and other animals have independently moderated reproduction, "it is also our nature to choose or to search for and put up a limit, to be at peace with what we have" (p.38).

Thus in chapter three, 'The limits of environmentalism', the author delves into an alternative vision of limits, drawing from the Romantics, the anarchy-feminists, and 'non-Western' perspectives. From these standpoints, nature is bountiful and generous, and it is nonetheless through people's *self-limitation* that we can achieve happiness and freedom. While Kallis acknowledges physical realities that are beyond our control (like gravity), he argues that limits are not material realities, but human creations based on societal goals. Kallis identifies five problems with the naturalization of limits:

- 1) environmentalists become doomsayers, which Kallis does not see as a good political option;
- 2) power relations and historical responsibilities are disguised, preventing true democracy and debate;
- 3) marginalized populations tend to be targeted by limits policies and discourse, threatening solidarities;
- 4) industrial interests promote and thrive on the uncertainty over 'precise' limits;
- 5) naturalizing limits actually naturalizes capitalism.

Kallis argues that (planetary) science is an ally for the environmentalist, but the real question is what kind of world we want, and for whom (p.64).

Kallis dedicates chapter 4 to discussion of the ancient Greeks, and builds on psychoanalysis and the work of philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis. In 'A culture of limits', he argues that instead of the unlimited wants that Malthus warned about for capitalist society, Aristotle proposed that human needs had a limit and that all-purpose money threatened this; the Greek response was limits to the circulation of money, with democracy (p.78-79). Following Castoriadis (1997), Kallis argues that recognizing *hubris* (transgression of undefined limits) and cultural forms including the 'Greek tragedies' signaled limits and democracy: one *can* do anything, but one *should not* do everything. He also suggests social institutions like extending democratic participation to non-experts, and the taxation of the wealthy, counteracted accumulation of power and money, respectively. Kallis delves into the role of the individual, and acceptance of death as a central task for humanity (rather than subduing nature), bridging Greek culture and Freudian perspectives. The chapter closes with a bid for introspection, which he says, allows for gentle creation of self-imposed limits: through psychoanalysis for the individual and through social democracy.

In his final chapter, 'The limits of limits', Kallis contends that the axis for societal self-limitation and transformation of society must be based on rectifying power inequalities. Limits should be practiced *autonomously*: "[f]reedom in a limitarian sense is not the unobstructed pursuit of desires, but the conscious reflection on, mastery, and liberation of them" (p.105). But also there are *heteronomous* limits restricting freedom, set by, as Castoriadis argues, God or nature, with geographical and temporal dimensions. It is in the creative tension and synthesis of these two, Kallis argues, where we can define social norms that allow space for self-expression, and even occasional lavishness. He compels us to look for expressions of self-contentment and solidarity in everyday life, without centering individual efforts as the only pathway to self-limitation. Kallis warns us that it is the logic of growth itself that is harmful for the environment, not any specific form of economic arrangement; therefore, socialism based on growth would have the same catastrophic consequences as faced under runaway capitalism.

Following Kallis's extensive theorization of degrowth (2017, 2018), *Limits* offers an archetype of *self-limitation*. He offers a stereotypical biography: namely a "Mediterranean woman or man who, having liberated desire and embraced contradiction, leads a sober life punctuated by wasteful outbursts" (p.115). In questioning scarcity, he makes sure to distinguish between the social scarcity of positional inequality (wanting what others can consume), which serves to the logic of unlimited wants, and the material experience of impoverishment that excludes people from meeting their basic needs (see also Mehta 2010). He also painstakingly addresses power relationships as they pertain to limiting consumption, and in the discussion of ancient Greece, presents elements of a society that worked towards a culture of limits. Nonetheless, he uncritically equates ancient Greek society with more contemporary hunter-gatherer societies ("affluent" societies in anthropological terms), and he only hints towards the ethics of care that he professes; but both of these concerns might be the result of

limited space in this very short book (157 pp.). In sum, the book is an important contribution to political ecology in a moment where climate change, framed as the new 'limit', has sparked the rise of geoengineering and carbon markets as viable options for continuing growth. Kallis argues against the notion of the environment as something to be managed, whether through the economy, political will, or following the recommendations of purportedly objective science. On the contrary, he tells us, to address environmental concerns we need to center people's fulfillment through self-limitation and democracy, rather than growth.

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