INQUIRY
2024, VOL. 67, NO. 6, 1908–1946
https://doi.org/10.1080/0020174X.2021.1977176

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Check for updates

The varieties of idealization and the politics of economic growth: a case study on modality and the methodology of normative political philosophy

David Plunkett

Associate Professor of Philosophy, Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH, USA

ABSTRACT

Are societies required to pursue continual economic growth as a matter of justice? In "The Value of Economic Growth", Julie Rose considers three arguments in favor of the need for continual economic growth, each of which revolves around the instrumental value of economic growth for promoting an important good that is needed for a just society. In each case, Rose argues that there are mechanisms other than economic growth that could allow a society to deliver the relevant goods, and thus meet the demands of justice with respect to those goods. I raise a set of issues for Rose's argument that put pressure on the normative significance of her discussion. At the heart of these issues are ones about which possibilities Rose considers and which idealizations she makes. These issues tie into more general questions about the aims and methodology of normative work in social/political philosophy. Thus, in addition to being a contribution to the debate over the politics of economic growth, this paper can be understood partly as a case study in how reflection on these kinds of issues – ones about modality, idealization, and methodology – can matter to how we evaluate specific arguments in social/political philosophy.

ARTICLE HISTORY Received 30 December 2020; Accepted 2 September 2021

KEYWORDS Economic growth; methodology of political philosophy; Julie Rose; idealization; modality

Introduction

Modern industrial societies are organized partly around the value of continued economic growth. This is reflected in, among other things, the public policies and laws of these societies, the explicit way they themselves measure their progress (e.g. at least partly through the level of GDP), widespread cultural attitudes that help structure and give significance to everyday activity, and core features of how major social/political institutions are organized (including at least some that help comprise

CONTACT David Plunkett david.plunkett@dartmouth.edu Dartmouth College Philosophy Department, 6035 Thornton Hall, 19 College Street, Hanover, NH 03755, USA

© 2021 Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

what John Rawls thought of as "the basic structure" of society).[1] Given this, an important normative question for political philosophy is how justified the pursuit of continued economic growth really is. There are a number of normatively important goods that (at least prima facie) continued economic growth appears to promote, including well-being, innovation, and beneficial cultural attitudes (such as those that seem to underpin social stability and the health of liberal democracies). In light of this, there is a clear prima facie case for societies to pursue continued economic growth. At the same time, there are many worries about the pursuit of continued economic growth, especially given how it has taken place in many modern societies, that need to be taken seriously. These include, for example, concerns about whether continued economic growth is compatible with long-term environmental sustainability, whether it is compatible with desirable kinds of social equality (e.g. perhaps those required for liberal democracies to function well), and whether the pursuit of economic growth (even if pursued as only one good among many) tends to "crowd out" (in an ideologically distorting way) our pursuit of a range of other goods that matter, including those that economic growth is meant to be valuable for (e.g. our well-being).[2] Moreover, consider an analogy with the life of an individual. After achieving a certain point of wealth, it seems that individuals might achieve a richer, fuller life if they gave up on the pursuit of even more wealth, and focused on other things instead. Perhaps, then, something parallel might be true for societies in general, once they have achieved a certain level of prosperity.

One important dimension of the broader normative question on the table – namely, the question of whether societies should pursue continued economic growth – concerns the relationship of economic growth to *justice*, which (in the post-Rawlsian period) many political philosophers take to be one of the central virtues (if not *the* central one) that should govern how we evaluate our social/political institutions. On this front, it's thus striking that Rawls – whose work on justice has been a dominant force in political philosophy since *A Theory of Justice* was published in 1971 – says little about the relationship between justice and economic growth. Perhaps more striking is what he does say in the few places he

[1]Rawls characterizes the "basic structure" of a society as follows: "the way in which the major social institutions fit together into one system, and how they assign fundamental rights and duties and shape the division of advantages that arises through social cooperation." (Rawls 1996, 258).

[2]In this paper, I use smallcaps to designate concepts (e.g., JUSTICE), single quotes (e.g., 'justice') to mention words, and double quotes (e.g., "justice") for a mix of uses, including quoting passages from other people's work, mixes of use and mention, and scare quotes.

discusses it. In short, he states that justice doesn't require continued economic growth (beyond a certain point). As he puts it, he rejects the idea that justice requires economic growth "to go on indefinitely, upwards and onwards".[3] It's not clear whether this claim really fits with Rawls's other commitments about justice – and, moreover, it's not clear *how* exactly it does, if indeed it does.[4] Part of the issue here is this: if continued economic growth really can help continually improve well-being (as it seems it can), shouldn't we want societies to continue to pursue it, at least to improve the lives of the worst-off? After all, Rawls argues in *A Theory of Justice* that justice "dictates that social and economic policies be aimed at maximizing the long-term expectations of the least advantaged".[5]

This context raises an obvious question: is Rawls right that justice doesn't demand pursuing continued economic growth? In her recent paper "The Value of Economic Growth", Julie Rose takes up this important question.[6] She does so not by asking about the details of Rawls's work, or of any particular theory of justice.[7] Instead, she asks two central questions, which she aims to address head on by drawing on a range of plausible ideas about justice (including those that animate the kind of "liberal egalitarian" views endorsed by Rawls). As she puts it, her two central questions are these: "Must a society aim indefinitely for continued economic growth?"[8] and "May a society justly cease to pursue further economic growth?"[9] In pursuing these questions, Rose is particularly focused on what *justice* as such requires of societies. Insofar as justice is a central virtue of social/political institutions – perhaps *the* central one, as it is often taken to be in the broadly Rawlsian tradition – our answer to these questions will obviously matter a great deal to the further normative question of what societies *authoritatively* should do (or are permitted to do), "all-things-considered".[10]

[3](Rawls 1999, 107, n.33).
[4]For connected sentiment, see (Freeman 2007a, 106) and (Freeman 2007b, 112).
[5](Rawls 1971/1999, 175).
[6](Rose 2020). It should be noted that my set up of the intellectual context in the last paragraph, including my discussion of Rawls (and the citations and quotes I use in that discussion), draws from Rose's own presentation of the intellectual context of her paper, which she uses to motivate her project. See (Rose 2020, 129).
[7]Rose discusses Rawls's position in further detail in (Rose Forthcoming).
[8](Rose 2020, 129).
[9](Rose 2020, 129).
[10]For more on the kind of "authoritative" ought I mean to invoke here, see (McPherson and Plunkett 2017), (McPherson 2018), (Plunkett 2019), (Wodak 2019), and (Enoch 2019). Roughly, the idea is meant to get across the kind of normative "ought" we invoke when we talk about what someone "really and truly" should do, or what they should do "full stop". I discuss this idea in more detail toward the end of this paper.

In "The Value of Economic Growth", Rose aims to make progress on her guiding questions by evaluating key components of the case in favor of the idea that justice requires societies to pursue continual economic growth. More specifically, Rose reconstructs and then evaluates what she takes to be three of the best (indeed, perhaps *the* best) arguments in favor of the need for perpetual economic growth. These arguments – which I discuss at greater length below – revolve around the instrumental value of economic growth with respect to three goods that matter from the standpoint of justice, on a range of (what Rose takes to be) plausible theories of justice (including, for example, liberal egalitarian theories in the broadly Rawlsian vein). These goods are as follows: (a) the well-being of people, (b) ongoing innovation, "which enhances people's opportunities and protects a society against future risks"[11], and (c) attitudes of toleration, openness, and generosity, which help sustain the kind of liberal democratic institutions that (according to the kinds of theories of justice Rose is working with) are required by justice. Rose grants the normative importance of each of these goods for the promotion (or maintenance) of a just society. However, she argues that mechanisms other than continual economic growth (which do not themselves depend on continual economic growth) could help promote (or realize) each of the relevant goods.[12] Based on this, she argues that there are at least some societies, in some circumstances, that could promote (or realize) the relevant goods to the degree demanded by justice by using mechanisms other than the pursuit of continual economic growth.

Rose's response to these three arguments in favor of continual economic growth can be seen as connecting back to her two central framing questions (namely, "Must a society aim indefinitely for continued economic growth?" [13] and "May a society justly cease to pursue further economic growth?"[14]) in the following way. If Rose (or anyone else) establishes that these three arguments are unsuccessful, then the position that economic growth is required by justice correspondingly decreases in plausibility, and the opposite idea, on which it is not required by justice, increases in plausibility. Thus, if Rose's response to three important arguments in favor of continued economic growth works, then it would lend significant support to the thesis that "justice does not

[11](Rose 2020, 138).
[12]I say "promote (or realize)" with a nod to the idea the relationship here between the good in question, and the mechanism(s) at hand, might be one of constitution (hence, "realization"), rather than promotion.
[13](Rose 2020, 129).
[14](Rose 2020, 129).

require a society to perpetually pursue economic growth".[15] Moreover, it is worth keeping in mind that Rose's argument takes place against a backdrop in which a number of her interlocutors – as well as, I take it, Rose herself – think there are independent arguments worth taking seriously for the thesis that continual economic growth is not required by justice. On this front, consider Rose's sympathetic discussion of John Stuart Mill's views on some of the potential virtues of a society that does not pursue ongoing economic growth (once a certain threshold of economic prosperity has been met). Put roughly, Mill argues that such a society could free up more time for its citizens to spend on activities other than the pursuit of economic gain, and thus could perhaps create *more* space for the pursuit of worthwhile goals and meaningful activities than a society dedicated to continued economic growth.[16] Rose doesn't give an extended argument on behalf of the Millian position, let alone fully endorse it. But I take it that her sympathetic discussion of the Millian line is meant to underscore something important about Rose's take on the overall dialectic around the politics of economic growth. In short, I take it, her discussion of Mill is meant to signal that Rose thinks that there are independently plausible arguments – or least ones worth taking at least somewhat seriously – in favor of the idea that justice doesn't require continual economic growth.[17]

This suggests a general argumentative strategy that one might pursue on behalf of the idea that justice does not require continual economic growth that draws on Rose's paper. This strategy is to argue on behalf of the Millian or Rawlsian arguments (or any other line of argument in favor of the idea that justice doesn't require continual economic growth), and then respond to all the best arguments (including the three that Rose considers in her paper, as well others) for the opposite position on which justice does require continued economic growth. Rose's paper (which, as I've emphasized, is squarely focused on responding to three arguments on behalf of the thesis that justice requires continual economic growth) doesn't fully carry out that strategy. Rather, her paper gives us a blueprint for how such a more ambitious argument

[15](Rose 2020, 144).
[16](Rose 2020, 131–133).
[17]This idea is also reinforced by Rose's brief discussion of Rawls at (Rose 2020, 129), as well as her brief discussion of the criticisms of continued economic growth she cites at (Rose 2020, 129). Furthermore, it is also reflected in Rose's choice to use the label of "challenges" to refer to the three lines of argument she reconstructs in favor of the thesis that justice requires economic growth. For if there weren't independently plausible lines of argument for the idea that justice doesn't require continual economic growth, why call them "challenges"?

of this sort might go, and thus the blueprint for one way of defending the idea that justice doesn't require continual economic growth. Moreover, if successful, her paper would also represent a key first step in carrying out that overall kind of argument.

In this paper, I raise a set of issues for Rose's argument that all, in one way or another, put pressure on the normative significance of her discussion, given the overall dialectic around the value of economic growth she engages with. The first issue concerns the *range* of values and goals a just society needs to pursue. In short, I argue that in order to know that it's permissible (from the standpoint of justice) for a society to not pursue economic growth, we need to know whether that society can, without pursuing continued economic growth, still do a good enough job of promoting *all* of the goods that matter to justice, and not just the ones Rose focuses on. Second, I argue that we need to know more about *how effective* Rose's alternative mechanisms are for delivering the goods in question, in order to know whether relying on such mechanisms can really satisfy the demands of justice. Third, I argue that Rose's argument faces an issue concerning the *type* of possibility at play in the debate over continual economic growth. I here argue that, at certain junctures, Rose's argument seems to concern issues about a wide kind of possibility (such as metaphysical possibility). I do *not* think this is the kind of possibility that Rose would (or should) reflectively endorse as the kind of possibility at issue. In the argumentative context at hand, what matters is something narrower (such as what's possible holding fixed certain contingent institutional facts about actual societies, in the actual world, and other contingent facts about human psychology). The issue is that if Rose's arguments sometimes tacitly switch to claims about a wider kind of possibility, this threatens to undercut the force of her main arguments, if those in fact concern a relevant (narrower) kind of possibility. Fourth, drawing on these earlier points, I argue that Rose's argument faces an issue concerning the kinds of idealization her arguments do (and do not) involve. In short, I argue that Rose doesn't have a consistent picture of which idealizations are (and are not) allowed, and why, and that this threatens to undercut the normative force of her arguments. Following this, I raise a fifth issue that is part of the background of my discussion of these earlier points, which concerns how demanding justice is, and what role it should play in our all-things-considered normative theorizing about what societies *authoritatively* should do with respect to the pursuit of continual economic growth.

Put together, these five points underscore that, for all Rose's main argument establishes, we might well end up with the conclusion that just societies need to pursue continued economic growth, at least in worlds resembling ours in any number of key respects. By itself, this conclusion is fully consistent with Rose's main argument in "The Value of Economic Growth", which, as I've emphasized, focuses on responding to three arguments in favor of the idea that justice requires economic growth, each of which revolves around a good needed for a just society. Rose aims to show the *possibility* of there being just societies that don't need to pursue continued economic growth to promote (or realize) the relevant goods discussed in the three arguments. A key issue, however, is just what normative importance this kind of "possibility proof" has if the kinds of just societies that need not pursue such growth are distant possibilities. If the debate at hand really concerns what just societies (authoritatively) should do in worlds resembling ours in any number of key respects, then it's not clear how much we are gaining by the kind of possibility proof Rose offers, even if it is successful on its own terms. The worry, in short, is that it might help us very little. At the same time, I argue that the issues I identify also point to a key way in which Rose undersells her own contributions to the discussion of what justice requires of actual societies in our actual world. Thus, in making my argument, I aim to help us get a better handle on what Rose's discussion does (and does not) contribute to the normative discussion around the value of economic growth, and put on the table a series of issues that matter for future discussion of the normative topics at hand.

In my view, Rose's philosophically rich paper on economic growth is well worth engaging with in its own right, as a contribution to an important interdisciplinary discussion about the politics of economic growth. This is one reason I take my arguments in this paper to matter. However, there is another reason as well, which is tied to general issues about the methodology of normative inquiry in social/political philosophy. For while my focus in the heart of the paper is squarely on Rose's discussion, many of the key points I make are general methodological ones, which bear on many normative arguments in contemporary social/political philosophy, whether about the politics of economic growth or other topics. In the conclusion of this paper, I underscore some of the general methodological lessons I think we can draw from my discussion of Rose's work on economic growth. As this final section underscores, one way to think of my work in this paper is as a sort of detailed case study, which brings out a set of connected issues for work

in normative social/political philosophy – including ones about which goods are discussed, which possibilities are considered, and which idealizations are used – and demonstrates their importance to how we assess specific normative arguments in social/political philosophy. One reason this sort of detailed case study matters is this. One common reaction that many philosophers have to work on philosophical methodology that proceeds at a relatively high level of abstraction – a kind of work that I often pursue – is to think something along the following lines: while the methodological issues under consideration might well be (at least somewhat) interesting, they nonetheless lack bite in the actual, on the ground, arguments of real "substantive" importance that take place in the relevant parts of the contemporary field. One way to respond to this reaction for those of us (such as myself) who think that methodological reflection often matters more than many philosophers appreciate, is to dig into a particular set of methodological issues and show how those issues actually play out in a specific contemporary argument or set of arguments. This paper can in part be seen as an instance of that sort of exercise. It thus can, in part, be seen as a defense of the potential importance of methodological reflection for work in contemporary social/political philosophy.

The instrumental value of economic growth

At the start of her paper, Rose sets up the terms of her debate by making two important clarifications. First, for the purposes of the paper, she follows "the conventional definition of economic growth as an increase in the level of real gross domestic product per capita."[18] Defining economic growth in terms of GDP obviously has certain limitations. However, as Rose emphasizes, the use of this definition is common ground in much of the normative debate over economic growth between critics and proponents of economic growth alike. Moreover, Rose argues that the definition tracks (even if imperfectly) "the underlying idea of economic growth as rising levels of income and wealth, or material standards of living"[19], and is thus well-suited to her purposes. Second, she clarifies that "a society that ceases to aim for further economic growth would cease to pursue economic growth in the arrangement of its political and economic institutions, the determination of its public policies, and

[18](Rose 2020, 130).
[19](Rose 2020, 130).

its indicators of social progress."[20] This way of thinking about things, as Rose emphasizes, allows for the possibility that a society might not aim for further continued economic growth (in the sense just described) but not achieve a zero economic growth rate. One reason for this is because a society might not aim for continued economic growth, and aim for something else instead, but still achieve the same amount of economic growth it would have achieved were it aiming for economic growth. Moreover, even if a society wanted to pursue zero economic growth as a goal, there might well be important normative limitations on what governments should do with respect to that goal, the recognition of which might influence the behavior of that society. For example, consider the plausible view (which Rose endorses) "that there are some individual liberty protections that limit the extent to which a government may constrain individuals' engagement in activities that might contribute to economic growth."[21]

As I explained above, Rose considers three main arguments in favor of a given society pursuing continued economic growth. These arguments are reconstructions of what Rose, drawing on a range of ideas that run through the literature on economic growth, takes to be three of the most powerful arguments in favor of the need for just societies to pursue continual economic growth. All three of these arguments assume that (a) the society in question has already achieved a sufficiently high level of income and wealth (where what exactly is "sufficient" is a further question, identified by the correct theory of justice, whatever that is) and (b) that the future growth in question will be sustainable and fairly distributed (again, according to the standards identified by the correct theory of justice).[22] Each argument makes a case for the *instrumental* value of economic growth in terms of promoting (or helping realize) a given good, which is independently taken to be important for the achievement (or maintenance) of a just society. In general, regardless of the specific good(s) at stake, this seems to be the basic *kind* of argument that proponents of the importance of continued economic growth for a just society should make. After all, it's highly implausible that a just society requires perpetual economic growth for its *own sake*. Instead, economic growth matters because of what else it allows societies to accomplish.[23] Rose considers three arguments for the instrumental

[20](Rose 2020, 130).
[21](Rose 2020, 130).
[22](Rose 2020, 129).

value of economic growth, each centered on a particularly important type of good.

The first argument (which she calls the "better off challenge") claims that "continued economic growth could make everyone within a society and globally, and especially the worst off, progressively better off".[24] Economic growth, as Rose emphasizes, increases well-being in many ways, including by increasing the number and kinds of goods people have access to (ranging from medicines to consumer goods), the amount of relevant goods they have access to (e.g. how much of a given medicine they can purchase), and the ease with which they can access those goods (e.g. through travel). As Rose discusses, increasing well-being is especially important if one thinks that a society has demanding duties of justice to help promote the well-being of people, not only in the society in question, but globally.[25] Continued economic growth might of course not lead to everyone being better off, as opposed to just some being better off. The core of the "better off challenge" is just that continued economic growth holds the promise of making everyone better off, including, crucially, those that are currently the worst off.

The second argument (which Rose calls the "innovation challenge") claims that "the pursuit of economic growth spurs ongoing innovation."[26] As Rose sees it, there are two main reasons why ongoing innovation matters for a just society: such innovation "enhances people's opportunities and protects a society against future risks."[27] As Rose discusses, the first good at stake here, the enhancement of people's opportunities, is closely tied to their well-being. The second good, the protection against future risks, is particularly important for ensuring intergenerational

[23]It should be underscored that this point is fully compatible with the idea that in certain contexts – e.g. when government officials make certain public policy decisions – they should use a model that treats economic growth as valuable, without keeping in mind the values that it is instrumentally valuable for. The use of such a model might, for example, help people make the right decisions, even if it doesn't track the underlying normative facts that make their decisions the right ones. (This idea draws on Peter Railton's discussion of decision procedures vs. "criterion of rightness" in (Railton 1984)). This is not to say that there aren't issues with the use of such models. For example, the use of such models runs the risk of people fetishizing the value of economic growth *as if* it was intrinsically valuable. This can lead to people not only making an intellectual mistake but also to their making practical mistakes based on this false view. In the context of thinking about Rose's argument, however, it's important that Rose isn't focused on the relative merits of certain decision procedures used by government officials, in certain social/historical contexts. Rather, given the way Rose sets things up in "The Value of Economic Growth", I take it that she is focused on whether justice does or does not in fact require societies to pursue continued economic growth (regardless of what decision procedures they might or might not adopt in pursuit of that goal). In any case, that is the issue I focus on in this paper, given that reading of Rose.

[24](Rose 2020, 129).

[25](Rose 2020, 135).

[26](Rose 2020, 129).

[27](Rose 2020, 129).

justice, given the unforeseen risks (e.g. environmental collapse of various kinds, wars, pandemics, etc.) that can emerge in the future. We can be confident that there will be significant issues we face in the future (and even confident, at least in broad outlines, about what kinds of issues we are likely to face) without knowing the details of which precise ones we will face. Insofar as ongoing innovation can help protect people against such risks, that's a reason that having ongoing innovation matters for the maintenance of a just society.

The third argument (which Rose calls the "social conflict challenge") claims "that continued economic growth fosters attitudes of openness, tolerance, and generosity, which are essential to the functioning of a liberal democratic society."[28] As Rose discusses, this challenge draws from recent work by Benjamin Friedman, who argues that (as Rose puts it) "economic growth is valuable not only for its material benefits but also for its 'moral benefits' – its positive effects on social attitudes and in turn political and social dynamics and institutions."[29] In short, Friedman's work (alongside other research in a similar vein) suggests that the maintenance of such attitudes is crucial for encouraging people to support the existence and maintenance of key institutions of liberal democracies that (by hypothesis) are part of a just society.

Rose responds in a similar way to each of the three arguments. In short, Rose grants (at least for the sake of argument) that each of the goods at stake matters for a just society. She then argues that it's possible for a just society to promote (or realize) those goods by means other than the pursuit of perpetual economic growth. As this gloss suggests, part of her argument involves an examination of different mechanisms other than economic growth for promoting the relevant goods. The other part of her argument addresses what exactly the relevant goods consist in – or at least what they should consist in, from the standpoint of the correct theory of justice. In each case, Rose emphasizes the multidimensional nature of the relevant goods at stake. For each of the three arguments, what Rose effectively does is argue that a society can continue "to aim for and realize gains on other dimensions"[30] tied to the good(s) in questions *besides* those dimensions that can exclusively be promoted (or realized) by economic growth. In this way, she aims to establish that there are other mechanisms that can support the relevant goods at stake. In making her arguments, Rose doesn't assume a specific theory

[28](Rose 2020, 129–130).
[29](Rose 2020, 141), discussing the work of (Friedman 2005).
[30](Rose 2020, 144).

of justice. Rather, she aims to work from a set of plausible theories of justice (including, centrally, different strands of "liberal egalitarian" theories) that converge on the importance of the relevant goods in question.

To get a sense of how her arguments here go, here is a brief overview of her main responses to each of the three arguments in favor of the idea that justice requires continued economic growth.

In response to the "better off challenge", Rose argues that the relevant metric of well-being should not be measured just by income, but also access to other goods – such as free time, and standing in certain kinds of relations to others and one's work (e.g. having a significant say in what that work looks like, and how much of it one needs to do).[31] If we accept this, we can see the possibility of a society that views increasing access to these other goods – through mechanisms other than continual economic growth – as an acceptable tradeoff for more limited income.[32] As Rose discusses, this possibility depends on how the resources that are relevant to well-being are related to each other, and what tradeoffs there are between them. It also depends on what the correct theory of justice is. Consider how these might interact. As Rose discusses, depending on how the relevant resources are weighted in an overall index for well-being, and what tradeoffs there are between those resources, it might turn out that the people who are "worst off" in a society would do better if that society prioritized the promotion of goods other than income – e.g. certain kinds of opportunities for free time, certain social relations, etc. that are part of the relevant multidimensional set of resources tied to well-being. This means the following: if one grants (which Rose does, at least for the sake of argument) that justice requires that societies make its worst-off members progressively better off, then, in order for a society to justly cease to pursue continual economic growth, it must be that the society could do a better job at helping the worst-off by *not* pursuing continual economic growth than it could by pursuing it. As Rose puts it, "if one accepts that a society must aim to make its worst-off members progressively better off, then a society may cease to pursue additional economic growth only if it realizes other gains which continue to expand their opportunities, and to a greater degree than any forgone income and wealth."[33]

[31] Rose discusses the value of free time – and how it relates to justice – in detail in (Rose 2016).
[32] (Rose 2020, 134–138).
[33] (Rose 2020, 138). Rose echoes this point later in the paper, when she writes that, on her view, the conditions for meeting the "better off challenge" involve the following: a society must "make its worst-off members better off, as compared to under alternative arrangements, by ceasing to pursue economic growth". (Rose 2020, 143, fn. 28). The relevant "alternative arrangements" that need to be considered

In response to the "innovation challenge", Rose argues that a "society can continue to promote ongoing innovation, by drawing on and fostering a broader array of motivations and by providing the social conditions and resources to support and incentivize innovation."[34] The level of innovation required by justice is tied to two separate goods that are at the core of the "innovation challenge": the expansion of opportunities and protection against future risk. These goods set up two corresponding conditions that a society must meet in order to respond to the "innovation challenge". The first condition is a comparative one, in line with what Rose puts forward with the "better off challenge". It requires that "innovation continues to a sufficient degree that a society's members, particularly the worst off, have greater opportunities, as assessed by a full weighted index, than they would with the continued pursuit of economic growth."[35] The second is not comparative in the same way. Instead, as she puts it, it requires that "innovation continues to a sufficient degree to meet a society's appropriately weighted obligation to protect against future risks."[36] Rose's proposal for meeting the "innovation challenge" is that a society could provide certain social conditions and resources that, in certain scenarios, could meet both requirements. It could do so, she claims, by harnessing such things as "the desire for public recognition"[37], "the desire for social esteem"[38], "intrinsic motivations" tied to relevant projects[39], and the need for organizations (including "democratic worker-controlled firms"[40]) to compete in order to maintain their market share insofar as they compete in any kind of market.[41] To illustrate some of the social conditions and resources that could be deployed, Rose brings up the idea of "direct funding or tax credits for research and development, capital funds awarded to projects on a competitive basis, or procedures to allocate funds to more efficient and innovative ventures."[42]

include ones where the society in question pursues continual economic growth *in addition to* pursuing whatever other resources are tied to well-being. When making that comparison, a lot will hang on what the "full weighted index" of resources that are tied to well-being consists in. As Rose puts it, the better off challenge can be met when "a society's members would in fact be better off, with reference to a full weighted index, than they would be in a society that continued to arrange its institutions and policies to pursue ever-greater levels of income and wealth." (Rose 2020, 143).

[34](Rose 2020, 140).
[35](Rose 2020, 140, fn. 24).
[36](Rose 2020, 140, fn. 24).
[37](Rose 2020, 141).
[38](Rose 2020, 141).
[39](Rose 2020, 141).
[40](Rose 2020, 140).
[41](Rose 2020, 140–141).
[42](Rose 2020, 141).

In response to the "social conflict challenge", Rose considers the psychological mechanisms that seem to help explain the relevant social scientific findings. In short, Rose here examines the idea that what seems to be crucial are people's assessments of how well-off they are relative to (a) people in the past (or their own past selves) and (b) people currently around them, whom they see as relevant "peers" in some way.[43] Here, Rose again draws on the idea, which she introduces in responding to the "better off challenge", that there are multiple dimensions of well-being, to argue that "a society's members may be continuously better off without continued economic growth."[44] Rose argues that, if this potential is realized, then it should be able to support the relevant positive psychological attitudes and social practices at issue in the "social conflict challenge".[45]

The range of goods that a just society needs to deliver

Suppose Rose establishes that societies can deliver the relevant goods in each of the three arguments she considers. A question then looms: what about the *other* goods that matter for the establishment (and maintenance) of a just society? For example, consider the need for a society to provide basic security for its citizens, so that the society is not taken over by another, unjust society. One important mechanism for doing that is for a society to have some kind of military to protect its citizens. What such a military will need to look like in order to effectively perform this function will depend in part on what other societies (especially unjust ones) do with their (potentially invading) militaries. In short, if unjust societies have militaries that continually grow in strength, there will be pressure for the military of a just society to grow as well (again, assuming that this military is meant to effectively perform the function of providing the requisite kind of national security). Of course, a just society could already have *such* a large military that it might not need to grow for some time, depending on the size and growth rate of the militaries of the relevant unjust societies. Or it might be so

[43](Rose 2020, 142).
[44](Rose 2020, 143).
[45]It is worth underscoring here the following clarification Rose makes about this response to the "social conflict challenge". She writes: "While a condition of meeting the better off challenge is that a society make its worst-off members better off, as compared to under alternative arrangements, by ceasing to pursue economic growth, the conditions of meeting the social conflict challenge itself are not similarly comparative. Rather, the challenge requires only that a society's members are continuously better off to the extent necessary to foster the relevant attitudes and to the extent essential to the functioning of a liberal democratic society." (Rose 2020, 143, fn. 28).

technologically advanced compared to other militaries that it need not grow for some time. The point is just that there will be pressure for the military of a just society to grow in size once the relative size of the militaries of the unjust societies meets certain thresholds. We should then ask: can a just society provide the necessary forms of national security *without* continued economic growth (which, arguably, is needed to support a growing military of the requisite strength)?[46] In her paper, Rose explicitly *assumes* that this can be done "through stable international security agreements or other means"[47] – where those other means might include (for example) the sort of comparative technological advantage of a military I sketched above. Her argument is that societies where this happens are not always going to be required by justice to pursue further economic growth.[48]

But is Rose's assumption – that it's possible to achieve national security "through stable international security agreements or other means"[49], without the pursuit of continual economic growth – actually correct? That's the kind of question we will ultimately need to ask for *all* the values required by justice. This is because in order to establish that justice does not require continued economic growth, one needs to show that every value that is needed for a just society can be achieved without it.[50] Of course, at a certain point in the overall discussion, after considering enough of the goods that matter for the achievement (and maintenance) of just societies, we might gain enough confidence in Rose's response for particular goods that we can make a kind of inductive argument that extends her general lines of argument to *all* the goods

[46]Thanks to Lucas Stanczyk for helpful discussion about this issue about national security, and for helping me appreciate some of the key reasons why it matters for Rose's arguments.

[47](Rose 2020, 133).

[48]It should be noted that instead of making the assumption that "international security agreements or other means" could provide the relevant kind of national security, another route for Rose to take here (which she doesn't do) would be to insist that her guiding normative questions about economic growth are, from the start, restricted in such a way that questions about other societies aren't part of the topic. One might take this approach, for example, by drawing on the sorts of idealizations Rawls does (and doesn't) go in for in (Rawls 1971/1999). If one took this path, one would need to give a principled philosophical rationale for why these idealizations are good ones to make, given the normative questions on the table. I discuss this kind of issue about idealization at greater length later in the paper.

[49](Rose 2020, 133).

[50]I take my wording of "every value that is needed for a just society" to leave open a range of important issues here, including, among other things, whether there can be tradeoffs between different values and what they can look like. I should also note that I am here (for the purposes of argument) taking it for granted that the relevant values could in theory be promoted (or realized) by a society pursuing continued economic growth (in the relevant range of possible worlds that matter in the discussion at hand). If they could not, and then neither could they be by a society not pursuing continued economic growth, then it is not clear what justice would permit. (That issue would depend, among other things, on the details of the correct theory of justice).

required for a just society. Yet, considering only three goods (the ones she discusses in her three challenges), arguably doesn't provide a sufficient basis for this kind of inductive argument – especially given that *at least* the important value of national security is still on the table. And there are other important values here that we will want to consider as well, such as the need to protect people from various kinds of violent conflict within the society itself.

I take it that Rose should grant this basic point, given her explicit focus on only some of the goods that matter to justice – namely, those that drive the three arguments she considers. So this point, by itself, is not meant to be anything like a direct objection to Rose's focused argument in "The Value of Economic Growth", which responds to three particular arguments in favor of justice requiring economic growth. Nonetheless, this point – about the range of values that justice requires promoting (or realizing) – matters for two reasons in the context of evaluating the normative significance of Rose's discussion, given the overall dialectic around the value of economic growth with which she engages. First, it underscores the depth of the challenge for anyone who wants to draw on Rose's work in "The Value of Economic Growth" to give anything like an overall case for the permissibility (from the standpoint of justice) of a society not pursuing continual economic growth. Second, there is the question of why Rose focuses on certain values that matter for a society to be just, and not others. Some of these values are harder to achieve than others – at least for societies that resemble actual societies in key respects. Thus, the question of which values Rose focuses on, and why, ties into the question of which kinds of possibilities she is (and is not) considering in her discussion, and why. This issue, as we will see, brings up deeper issues about modality and methodology, which I will develop in later sections. However, before I turn to those issues, I first want to introduce another issue – which, as I will discuss, also ties into these deeper issues about modality and methodology.

How effective are the mechanisms Rose identifies?

Consider the goods at stake in the three arguments in favor of continual economic growth that Rose considers. In each case, Rose aims to establish that there are mechanisms by which the relevant good could, in theory, be promoted (or realized) by mechanisms other than continued economic growth. Even if she is successful in this task, this, however, would not establish that the relevant degree of promotion (or realization) can be

reached in each case by the mechanisms Rose describes. This matters a great deal in the context of evaluating arguments about the instrumental value of continued economic growth. What we ultimately need to know is that the mechanisms that Rose describes can help deliver the necessary amount of the relevant goods that justice requires. This amount might be different for each of the different goods, given the kinds of goods they are, and given what the correct theory of justice requires. So, to evaluate the overall normative argument at hand, what we need to know is where that bar is for the different goods, and why we should think that the particular mechanisms Rose discusses meet that bar. So far, Rose's arguments give us a blueprint for how the mechanisms she describes could, under certain circumstances, be reasonably thought to work on this front, given (purportedly) plausible ideas about what justice demands. But without knowing more about how effective these mechanisms actually are, we don't really know whether they will be able to deliver the relevant goods in circumstances that are at all similar to those in the actual world.

One obvious way for Rose to respond to this issue about the effectiveness of the mechanisms she discusses is to emphasize the fact that her explicit goal in "The Value of Economic Growth" is *not* to settle whether a given society, in a given set of circumstances, is permitted (by the standards of justice) to eschew further economic growth. As I've emphasized, that's *not* her goal in the paper. Rather, as I've discussed, her goal is to respond to three arguments that each support the general idea that justice requires societies to pursue continual economic growth. For each argument, she aims to show that the relevant goods that (at least for the sake of argument) she grants matter for justice can be promoted (or realized) through means other than the pursuit of continual economic growth. Given this focus, she can then grant that, if we focus on any specific society (or set of societies), we need to investigate how effective the mechanisms she describes are in the particular circumstances at hand. Thus, for the purposes of her paper, she might insist that she can remain neutral on this issue about the effectiveness of the mechanisms she discusses, as long as she shows the possibility of such mechanisms working, given background assumptions about what justice requires. I am sympathetic to this line of response. But it raises a general issue, to which I turn in the next section, which concerns the kinds of possible societies that Rose ends up discussing, and why. As I argue, the kind of possibility at stake will impact *how* effective the mechanisms she identifies need to be in order to support her idea that it is

permissible (from the standpoint of justice) to stop pursuing economic growth.

Types of possibility

As I've just emphasized, Rose's core argument concerns the *possibility* of a society meeting the demands of justice without continued economic growth. She aims to show us some possible ways for a society to deliver the relevant goods demanded by justice without relying on continued economic growth. In particular, she's concerned with the goods at stake in the three arguments that she's focused on. If her response to these three arguments is correct, it undercuts an important line of support for the thesis that justice requires continual economic growth, and thus provides an important line of support for the opposite view, on which justice does not require continual economic growth.

Suppose that the basic argument-type Rose uses for responding to these three arguments can be extended to cover all the goods that matter for justice (including national security). We should now ask: what kind of possibility is at stake here? And what kind *should* be at stake? To see why this issue matters, consider the following. It's possible – in at least some broad sense of "possible", such as *conceptual* or *metaphysical* possibility – that a scientist could develop a drug that not only makes everyone very happy, but, moreover, increases their happiness over a lifetime. We can even stipulate that scientists continue to refine this drug, such that the next generation of people who take the drug would be happier than the next, and so on. Would those who think that the "social conflict challenge" provides a good reason to favor economic growth be satisfied with the sheer conceptual or metaphysical possibility of such a miracle drug? I doubt it. And neither, I think, would Rose. This is evidenced by the fact that, in responding to the three main arguments about the instrumental value of economic growth that she considers, Rose focuses on what she takes to be relatively *promising* mechanisms for delivering the goods in question, given current social scientific evidence.

What this brings out is that, whatever kind of possibility is at stake in these arguments, it's something narrower than mere conceptual or metaphysical possibility. By this, I mean roughly the following: the range of possible worlds that matters here is *not* either (a) those worlds that are consistent with the conceptual truths about the key relevant concepts we are deploying (e.g. worlds that involve societies that are aptly

described as "just", in a usage that is consistent with the content of the concept JUSTICE that many people currently express with the term 'justice') and (b) those worlds that are consistent with the basic metaphysical truths about the key relevant objects, entities, etc. at issue (e.g. including every possible world that consistent with the nature of justice as such, and the nature of economic growth as such).[51] The fact that these kinds of possibility aren't what is at stake in these arguments isn't, by itself, a particularly striking claim. But it raises the following important question: what kind of possibility *is* at stake in these arguments? Rose doesn't specify much of anything about what that kind of possibility is. Moreover, as I discuss below, it seems that she might tacitly switch between discussing different kinds of possibility at different points in her argument in an unprincipled way. This both undercuts the normative force of her arguments, and also undersells what she in fact accomplishes in her paper.

Let's start with the way in which this undercuts the normative force of her arguments. The first thing to note here on this is that, in the dialectical context at hand, it matters that the kind of possibility that Rose discusses *matches* the relevant kind of possibility involved in the best versions of the three "challenges" she discusses (or that would be used in the best versions of the parallel "challenges" about national security or other values). When we think about what the best versions of those challenges might look like, a striking fact is that all of the kinds of reasons that Rose herself cites in favor of taking such arguments seriously are ones that draw heavily from social science research that seems to suggest a *contingent* connection between economic growth and the way in which it helps promote (or helps realize) a further good that is (by hypothesis) required by justice. For example, consider the "social conflict" challenge. The relevant social science research that Rose engages with in discussing the "social conflict" challenge suggests the following: *given* certain facts about the way individual human psychologies operate and how societies in general operate, there is a connection between ongoing economic growth and the promotion of attitudes of openness, tolerance, and generosity, which are crucial to the functioning of a liberal democratic society. People who draw on this social science research to make the case for the normative importance of continued economic growth – such as, for

[51]These characterizations draw on fairly standard ways of thinking about conceptual and metaphysical possibility. But if one prefers any number of other leading characterizations, that's fine too. The details aren't crucial here, so much as the main idea of these kinds of possibility. I should also note that, by the term 'possible world', I just mean something fairly standard in contemporary philosophy, along the lines of a "complete description of the way things might be". It is obviously a further (and contentious) question of what the metaphysics of possible worlds consists in, which I remain neutral on here.

example, Benjamin Freidman, William Galston, Yascha Mounk, and Tyler Cowen – aren't asserting that this kind of connection is one that is *metaphysically* necessary for a just society (which, for now, we can take to have at least important elements of a liberal democracy).[52] Instead, they are making a kind of historical or sociological claim, which is best read as only applying to a certain range of societies, in a certain range of possible worlds.

A range of other instrumentalist arguments in favor of continued economic growth are also best understood as making a similar kind of historical or sociological claim. For example, consider Steven Pinker's argument that aims to show that (thanks in part to economic growth) the rates of violent conflict within societies have radically decreased over time, thus contributing in serious ways to increased well-being, reduction of various basic rights violations (e.g. those tied to one not being violently attacked by others), and thus to increased justice.[53] Or consider Angus Deaton's work on how advances in public health (made possible in part by economic growth, including by such growth helping fund crucial forms of basic scientific research) have contributed to massive gains in well-being over time, for huge numbers of people.[54] These connections might be quite modally robust. For example, many kinds of serious medical research (as well as basic science research that supports it) seem to require significant amounts of money in worlds like ours. That suggests that there will often be – at least for creatures like us, in worlds like ours – a tight connection between economic growth and medical research, thus making something like the connection Deaton discusses a quite modally robust connection, which holds in many possible worlds similar to the actual world in key respects. But, crucially, the connection isn't one of metaphysical necessity. We can easily imagine science fiction cases where the connection breaks down, given, for example, different combinations of abundant free clean energy sources and already *extremely* advanced scientific research (making the possibility of any further medical advances that would have a meaningful impact on human well-being vanishingly small).

What I think this preceding discussion suggests is the following: those who want to draw on social science research to make an *instrumentalist* case for the value of continued economic growth (the kind of case Rose is considering) shouldn't be making a claim about how continued

[52]See (Friedman 2005), (Galston 2014), (Mounk 2018), and (Cowen 2018).
[53](Pinker 2018).
[54](Deaton 2013).

economic growth is required by justice as a matter of metaphysical or conceptual necessity. Instead, they should be making claims along the following lines: what societies *in worlds like ours in such-and-such relevant respects* need to do in order to achieve (and maintain) a just society, or what's a *feasible* way for them to achieve (and maintain) a just society. Obviously, much then hinges on what those "such-and-such relevant respects" are, or what the relevant "feasibility" constraints look like.[55] There will of course be a range of different ways such arguments can be developed. How they should be developed will depend, in part, on the normative ambitions of those making the arguments, and what kinds of generalizations the relevant social science research actually supports. For example, on the latter point, it will depend (in part) on whether the connection between a given good and economic growth is one tied to deep (if still metaphysically contingent) features of human psychology, or more to certain distinctive features of modern industrial societies. The worry is just that, for many ways of spelling out what the "such-and-such relevant respects" are, or what the relevant "feasibility" constraints are, Rose's arguments won't establish that her mechanisms really can deliver the goods at stake. And if they can't, then the strongest, most relevant arguments in favor of continued economic growth remain standing.[56]

At the same time, the lack of discussion about the kind of possibility at stake means Rose undersells the contribution of her discussion. This is because the mechanisms she describes as potentially delivering the goods demanded by justice are informed by (what she takes to be) our best social science, rather than science fiction examples. In some cases, what she is doing is identifying mechanisms that already have some measure of empirical support behind them, and, in others, she is

[55]For a helpful overview of some of the recent discussion about the nature of feasibility, and what role it should (or should not) have in various normative arguments in political philosophy, see (Southwood 2018).

[56]It should be noted that critics of the pursuit of continued economic growth might well use this same line of argument I am pressing here against Rose to criticize some arguments in favor of continued economic growth. This is because, in short, one might well worry that (at least some) of those arguments involve idealizations (e.g. ones about continued environmental sustainability) that fail to connect to the idealizations (or lack thereof) involved in the best versions of the best arguments against continued economic growth, and, thus, which fail to address the relevant kinds of possibilities at issue. I think that it is well worth investigating further how effective this line of criticism is against those (such as (Friedman 2005), (Galston 2014), (Mounk 2018), and (Cowen 2018)) who argue in favor of continued economic growth. So too do I think it is worth investigating how other lines of argument I develop in this paper might be used in criticizing arguments in favor of continued economic growth. Doing that work might well help us better engage in normative arguments about continued economic growth. It is, however, well beyond the scope of this paper to pursue these potential extensions of my arguments in any detail.

identifying relatively novel ones that merit further study. As such, she's *already* contributing to the discussion about what *actual* societies can do with respect to delivering the goods in question – even if not currently, perhaps sometime in the near future. This contribution is obscured by failing to say more about the kind of possibility she is concerned with.

The issues here about the relevant kind of possibility connect back in important ways to the earlier two points I made, about the range of goods at stake for the full theory of justice, and about how effective the mechanisms are that Rose identifies. Let's take each in turn.

On the first issue: note that if all we were concerned with was metaphysical possibility, then we could safely ignore worries about how to deliver *many* goods (for *many* societies, in *many* possible worlds) that matter from the standpoint of justice. For example: it's surely metaphysically possible for there to be a world in which only one small society exists, which faces no threat of being taken over by another unjust society, and thus doesn't need to worry about providing a military for national security. Possible worlds in which such a society exists are very distant from the actual world. This is part of why, I take it, Rose thinks she needs to at least *assume* (even if not argue for) that just societies can provide the requisite amounts of national security even without perpetual economic growth. And, as I argued before, this seems to be on the right track, given that the kinds of instrumentalist arguments on the table in favor of continued economic growth should be ones that are concerned with societies resembling actual societies in our world, in at least certain key respects, rather than any potential society in distant possible worlds.

On the second issue, suppose we agree on some type of possibility for our discussion about the normative importance of economic growth. The question of how effective the mechanisms are that Rose identifies then looms larger. For, if the kind of possibility is narrower than metaphysical (or, relatedly, conceptual) possibility, she can't just claim that how effective the mechanisms are is a *further* question, outside the scope of her main argument. This is because she will need to show that the mechanisms meet a certain bar of effectiveness, in certain kinds of conditions, to establish that these mechanisms are ones that are possible to use in the relevant kinds of conditions that matter (where which ones are relevant is tied to the kind of modality at issue in the relevant normative arguments). To illustrate, suppose we are concerned with what's possible for large, multiethnic, industrial societies that include people with a diverse range of moral views and visions of what's valuable in life, and existing

alongside other societies. In other words: suppose we consider the kinds of societies that are the standard focus in much of contemporary political philosophy, including in the broadly Rawlsian tradition.[57] And suppose we hold fixed a range of psychological facts about the way we as humans operate. We will then need to know whether the mechanisms that Rose identifies are *effective enough* to deliver the requisite goods (namely, the ones at issue in any of the instrumentalist arguments at hand) in such circumstances.[58]

Which idealizations, and why?

My discussion in the last section about types of possibility is closely tied to a more general issue with Rose's argument, which, I think, arises for *many* arguments in social/political philosophy. This issue concerns which idealizations are being made, and why.

Rose, like many contemporary social/political philosophers, is explicit about the fact that she is making many idealizations in setting up her discussion about justice and economic growth, and about what many of those idealizations are. There is, in general, nothing wrong *as such* with making idealizations when engaged in inquiry, whether in biology, linguistics, political philosophy, or any other field. Far from it. Idealizations can be useful for any number of reasons. For example, idealizations of various sorts can help us zero in on important phenomena by isolating different potential factors at play, develop models of various kinds that aid in explanation, and, in normative domains, articulate goals we might want to strive for.[59] But, when making idealizations, it will often be helpful to ask *why* we are doing so, as well as why we are making certain idealizations as opposed to others.[60] Suppose one is interested in making an argument about what's possible *for creatures with psychologies like ours in such-and-such respects*. If so, one should be wary of idealizing away those "such-and-such respects". Or, if one does so, one should then have some sort of story about how the resulting idealized model (which doesn't include creatures with psychologies like ours in the

[57]See, for example, (Rawls 1971/1999) and (Rawls 1996).

[58]The kind of question I am bringing up here isn't about a given specific society, but rather a broader issue about how generally effective the relevant mechanisms are, in certain kinds of circumstances. This is different than a question about whether these mechanisms can effectively deliver the relevant goods in a given specific society. (That's the kind of question that Rose brings up at the end of her paper in (Rose 2020, 144) as a "further question" that goes beyond the scope of her paper).

[59]For some of the relevant discussion here, across a range of different fields of inquiry, see (Appiah 2017), (Yalcin 2018), (Godfrey-Smith 2006), (Weisberg 2013), and (Valentini 2012).

[60]For connected discussion, see (Enoch 2018) and (Enoch 2005).

relevant respects) somehow bears on creatures that do have psychologies with the relevant properties.

With this in mind, consider the kinds of idealizations Rose makes. Recall that, in setting up the instrumentalist arguments in favor of economic growth that she discusses, Rose starts by assuming that (a) the societies in question have already achieved a sufficiently high level of income and wealth (where what exactly is "sufficient" is a further question, identified by the correct theory of justice) and (b) the future growth in question will be sustainable and fairly distributed (again, according to the standards identified by the correct theory of justice).[61] These are both striking assumptions for Rose to make in setting up her overall argument.

Consider the first one. Suppose one thinks that justice sets a very high bar for the amount of well-being a society must achieve for its members (as well as for others who aren't members of it). Then we might be *very far* from that bar currently, as Rose fully acknowledges in her discussion.

Now consider Rose's second assumption, that the future growth in question will be sustainable and fairly distributed (again, according to the standards identified by the correct theory of justice). As Rose underscores, this is a major assumption, which puts aside some of the main worries people have had about perpetual economic growth. For example, as Rose discusses, many environmentalists have worried that perpetual economic growth will prove to be unsustainable in the long-run, such that, if pursued indefinitely, it will lead to environmental collapse.[62] In turn, this kind of collapse could lead to massive decreases in the well-being of human beings (and non-human animals) that survive, or at least lead to there being far fewer of them.[63] To get the possibility of such apocalyptic scenarios in view, just consider the full range of outcomes that our best current science projects having some decent likelihood of happening in the future given anthropogenic climate change.[64] Or, even if these sorts of doomsday scenarios are off the table, we might still worry about (as many environmentalists do), the loss of goods (e.g. certain kinds of goods associated with nature) that matter a great deal, either intrinsically or instrumentally for the well-being of both humans and non-human animals, which can't easily be

[61](Rose 2020, 129).
[62]See, for example, (McKibben 2007).
[63]Though it should be noted that, depending on what kind of collapse it is, certain non-human animals (e.g., certain kinds of insects) might both thrive and increase in number, even when others (e.g., humans and many mammals) do not. For discussion, see (Sebo 2021).
[64]See, for example, the summary in (Wallace-Wells 2019) of various scenarios described by current climate science.

replaced by access to other goods.[65] Now consider the issue of "fair distribution". There is here (as Rose is well aware of) a long-standing concern about the ways in which economic growth (at least of certain kinds) leads to levels of inequality that many take to be unjust, or otherwise normatively undesirable. Such concerns show up, for example, in classic work by Jean-Jacques Rousseau.[66] And they also do in more recent work on the relative costs and benefits of hunter-gatherer societies compared to large-scale modern industrial societies, and in some takes on the overall history of inequality.[67] In effect, by stipulating away both of these sets of issues, Rose takes off the table many of the most discussed critiques of the pursuit of perpetual economic growth. Of course, those critiques might well be significantly overstated (at least in their standard forms), or simply flat out wrong.[68] The point, however, is not that these critiques are totally correct. Rather, it is just that they are some of the main ones people make of the idea of perpetual economic growth.

Rose takes her idealizing assumptions to involve ones "of favorable conditions"[69] for the proponent of economic growth, which serve "to focus the analysis on the value of economic growth itself".[70] One way to see how such assumptions could help sharpen our focus in this way is to emphasize the following point: if Rose assumes certain well-known critiques of perpetual economic growth can be countered for the cases at hand, it makes it *harder* for someone (such as herself) to resist the normative case for perpetual economic growth. This is certainly true, in at least one straightforward way of thinking about things. But notice that it also creates another issue for Rose. This is that it's unclear what kind of possibility Rose is asking us to focus on in her argument, and, moreover, whether there really is a coherent set of possible worlds for us to focus on in evaluating her argument. Furthermore, it's not clear that Rose's various arguments all bear on what she takes to be the relevant kind of possibility, whatever that is.

[65] See, for example, (Turner 1996) and (McKibben 1989).
[66] See (Rousseau 1755/1997).
[67] See (Diamond 1999) and (Scott 2017). For connected discussion, see (Anderson 2017). See also (Piketty 2013) and (Scheidel 2017), both of which emphasize (in different ways, citing different mechanisms) how difficult it is to counter growing inequality while also continuing to pursue economic growth.
[68] For example, it might well be that the only normatively acceptable way forward on climate change that is feasible *requires* continued economic growth. To see how this might go, consider arguments that stress the instrumental role of economic growth in spurring the relevant technological innovations needed to find alternative energy sources to displace fossil fuels (in the relevant time frame), or to spur technological development in plant-based proteins that could displace the global reliance on (the environmentally costly) animal-based proteins in human diets.
[69] (Rose 2020, 134).
[70] (Rose 2020, 133).

To press this issue, consider the following tension in Rose's work.

On the one hand, at different points in Rose's argument, we are asked to imagine possible worlds that might be *very far* from the actual world. As Rose emphasizes, it might be that all (or at least many) current societies are *very* far from being in a position to satisfy the conditions in which (according to her framework she develops) it would be permissible to eschew pursuing further economic growth. In short, it might be that the mechanisms that Rose brings up for promoting the relevant goods in each challenge can only do a good enough job of promoting those goods in distant possible worlds, which are significantly different from the actual world in key respects. Perhaps more importantly, consider that if certain environmentalist critiques are on the right track, it might be *nomologically* impossible for perpetual economic growth to be compatible with long-term environmental sustainability. In other words: it might be incompatible with the basic laws of nature for there to be continual economic growth that is sustainable. That thought might of course be wrong. But (at least given our current epistemic situation) it certainly seems like an open question whether it is, which we can't just settle from the armchair without serious empirical investigation. So, whatever kind of idealization Rose is appealing to in her own positive arguments about how it is possible to instrumentally promote certain key goods without continued economic growth, it seems like it involves considering what (given our current epistemic situation) we should take to be *potentially* nomologically impossible worlds. This follows from the fact that Rose assumes from the start (at least for the sake of argument) that the aforementioned environmental issues can be dealt with.

On the other hand, as I emphasized earlier, Rose draws on current social science to show how goods tied to justice can (at least potentially) be promoted (or realized) by mechanisms that don't rely on continued economic growth. As I emphasized earlier, that suggests that (as is often the case for discussions in political philosophy) there is a more narrow kind of modality at issue than sheer metaphysical possibility – and, indeed, one narrower than nomological possibility as well. And this, I argued, is a good thing, insofar as the instrumentalist arguments in favor of economic growth that really matter are ones that emphasize contingent connections (of varying levels of strength) between continued economic growth and the relevant goods.

As this brings out, in different parts of the discussion, it seems that Rose is assuming that different kinds of possibilities are relevant or not. This is tied to her holding fixed (or not) different facts (of a range of different

kinds, including facts about psychology, sociology, laws of nature, etc.) when she is (or is not) making certain idealizations. Moreover, it's not just that the idealizations she uses are different in different, clearly distinct parts of her argument that don't impact each other. For example, given her setup, once we get to the part of her argument that concerns whether certain mechanisms could deliver relevant goods, we might be being asked to do so in worlds that are quite different from the actual world in key respects: such as, for example, potentially nomologically impossible worlds, or, less drastically, in worlds where the national security of just societies seems much easier to ensure than it seems to be for societies in our actual world. We can also consider here the different mechanisms for how to promote the relevant goods in each of the three arguments she considers on behalf of the idea that justice requires continual economic growth. In short, some of those mechanisms seem more likely than others to help deliver the relevant goods (to the degree demanded by justice) in the actual world, while others seem like they might only be able to do the job in possible worlds that are quite different from the actual world in key respects, while others only in worlds that are quite different in other respects. This continuum might well be fine, and simply a feature of the relative promise of the different mechanisms. However, if the bar here with these mechanisms is shifting for what kind of possibilities matter for assessing those mechanisms, it also could lead to what is potentially an unstable mix of possibilities that we are asked to consider when thinking about whether justice requires that societies pursue continual economic growth. There are four interconnected worries here about this potentially "unstable mix".

First, there is the worry that there isn't a stable set of possible worlds for us to consider in evaluating Rose's arguments, such as in evaluating whether the relevant mechanisms she considers for delivering important goods relevant to justice really can deliver those goods in the relevant possible worlds. Among other things, this could mean that we aren't in a good epistemic position to assess the kinds of possibilities she is considering at key points in her argument – for example, whether the relevant mechanisms really could potentially deliver the relevant goods at stake, in the relevant possible worlds.

Second, there is a worry that there isn't a consistent story Rose is operating with (whether that story is articulated or not) about what kinds of possibilities matter for her overall discussion, and why. Such a story might involve a certain kind of unity, on which the same kinds of possibilities matter throughout her discussion. Or it might be one that involves a

certain kind of principled *disunity* – where, for example, one kind of modality is at issue in framing assumptions about environmental sustainability and national security, and another kind is for each of the three arguments in favor of economic growth that she considers. Such a "disunified" story would need to be one that showed why this kind of disunity ultimately illuminated whatever modality matters for the overall debate Rose is interested in – that is, the debate she introduces with the questions "Must a society aim indefinitely for continued economic growth?" and "May a society justly cease to pursue further economic growth?".[71] Whatever sort of disunity there might be in the details of the discussion, we would still want a consistent take on the specific kind of modality that ultimately matters for the *overall* starting questions Rose uses to set the topic of the general normative debate she is interested in. And we would then want the arguments aimed at answering those questions to be ones that consider possibilities that, either directly or indirectly, help us answer those questions, given the kinds of possibilities at issue in those questions.

A third worry is that, at different points in her argument (such as in her assumptions about how issues about national security could be handled, or in some of the potential mechanisms she asks us to consider for delivering the goods necessary for justice discussed in the three "challenges" she considers), Rose seems to be discussing certain kinds of possible societies that are possible in a fairly wide sense of "possible". If these are only possible in a fairly wide sense of "possible", it is unclear why this kind of possibility is relevant *given* the kinds of possibilities that she is interested in with her guiding questions.

Finally, the fourth worry is that, without a clearer story about why she appears to be considering different kinds of possible scenarios in different parts of her argument, the choices Rose is making about which kinds of possibilities to consider or not – tied to which idealizations to use, and when – might be objectionably ad hoc. For example, it's not clear why the worries about national security can just be assumed away by appeal to mechanisms that seem most likely to work in more distant possible worlds, whereas, for the other challenges, Rose seems to be placing the bar higher for what the relevant mechanisms need to look like: roughly, that they have a shot in working in possible worlds more like the actual world in key respects.

[71] (Rose 2020, 129).

I don't think these worries yield knock-down objections to Rose's arguments, or that they undercut the potential of her arguments to be further developed to make a serious contribution to the discussion about the politics of economic growth. Far from it. The thought, rather, is that these are serious worries which Rose should address in order for her arguments to have more normative bite in the wider discussions about the politics of economic growth that she aims to make a contribution to, and in order to help put us in a better epistemic position to evaluate the relevant possibilities that matter either for her arguments or for those wider discussions. To respond to these worries, I think it is worth stepping back and asking what kind of possibilities matter (or should matter) for Rose when she asks the general question of whether justice requires societies to pursue continual economic growth, and then trying to articulate an explicit view on that.

I should clarify that, in suggesting this, I don't mean to imply that this is something that always must be done whenever one engages in inquiry in social/political philosophy that involves considering possibilities. After all, in much of our lives, people seem to be able to track *well enough* the relevant kinds of possibilities that are relevant (to a conversation, to an inquiry, etc.) to allow the relevant activities to proceed in a fruitful way *without* anyone explicitly stating (or even fully understanding) what exactly those possibilities are, or why they are the relevant ones. So, as a matter of general methodology, we should be skeptical of the idea that Rose (or anyone else) needs to fully articulate what the relevant kind of possibilities here are in order for inquiry to proceed in a fruitful way. But, at the same time, explicit reflection on which possibilities matter, and why, might be helpful in certain cases. My idea here is that, given the worries about the mix of possibilities Rose discusses, such reflection would be useful in this case. Furthermore, there is a more general reason it might be useful. This is that Rose's discussion (in line with many discussions in philosophy, as well as in the natural and social sciences) involves asking people to consider different possibilities than they standardly consider by default in deliberating about what to do.[72] In cases where a theorist (either implicitly or explicitly) asks people to shift away from considering those default possibilities, and to consider some other group of possibilities instead, it can be useful – and, sometimes, indeed, crucial – to say more about what these other

[72]For discussion of what those "default" possibilities are that we consider in such deliberation (and in related contexts), see (Phillips and Knobe 2018) and (Phillips, Morris, and Cushman 2019).

possibilities are, so that people can successfully think about those possibilities rather than the ones they default to in general when engaged in practical reasoning.

One option here would be for Rose to go for a very wide kind of possibility (e.g. nomological or metaphysical possibility). If she went this route, it would then be hard to see how Rose's argument about this kind of possibility cuts any ice against the kinds of normative arguments about the instrumental value of economic growth that animate those pushing a "pro-growth" line, given their focus on certain kinds of contingent connections between economic growth and the goods relevant to justice. This, I think, is a strong reason (even if not a conclusive one) for Rose to *not* hold that her guiding question about the relation between justice and economic growth concerns a very wide kind of possibility (e.g. metaphysical possibility). Moreover, as I read her, I think it is pretty clear that Rose does *not* want to go this route, given the kinds of arguments that she generally makes. If I am right, her arguments might well, at certain important junctures, tacitly slip into discussing certain kinds of possible societies that are possible only in a wide sense of "possible". But, at the end of the day, I take it that the most charitable reconstruction of Rose is that her aim in the paper is ultimately to focus on a narrower kind of possibility, which (put roughly) is tied to more contingent features of actual societies in the actual world, or tied to feasibility constraints of various kinds.

So suppose then that we take Rose to ultimately be interested in a narrower kind of possibility (that is, one tied more to contingent features of actual societies in the actual world, or tied to feasibility constraints of various kinds) when she asks the question of whether justice requires continual economic growth. This is how I think we should read her. Moreover, it is what I think she should be concerned with, given the broader normative debate at hand that she wants to address. The worry is that, if we go this route, it's then unlcear how much Rose's existing positive arguments in "On the Value of Economic Growth", about how it is possible for a society to deliver certain goods without continued economic growth, really speak to the relevant kinds of possibility at play – or at least not in the sort of sustained way that would make a significant difference to the normative arguments at hand. The issue, in short, is that it is not clear what broader normative conclusions we can really draw from her arguments in "On the Value of Economic Growth" as stated, without saying more in response to the four worries about the seemingly "unstable mix" of possibilities that I raised above. In short, for her

argument to have more significant normative bite in the debate over economic growth, Rose needs to address these four worries.

Finally, let me close by making a connected general point about Rose's use of idealization in her argument. Even if it falls outside the scope of Rose's paper I've been focusing on, at the end of the day, we will eventually want to know what *actual* societies should do in circumstances *like the ones we face in the actual world*. To speak to that, Rose will need some way to connect whatever results she gets by thinking through normative issues about what justice requires in idealized circumstances to what justice requires in the actual world. There are of course many such bridge principles one might appeal to here. The point I want to make in closing this section is that whichever bridge principles Rose appeals to will need to be sensitive to the particular kinds of idealizations *she* makes, and to the kinds of normative arguments to which she intends to respond to (e.g. the instrumentalist arguments in favor of economic growth that she discusses). To appreciate the importance of this, suppose that one has some kind of argument in favor of how Rawlsian "ideal theory" about justice bears on what justice requires of societies in our current, non-ideal circumstances, or what we might refer to as the "unjust here and now". There are different dimensions of idealization that Rawlsians rely on. But some of the central ones – for example, assuming conditions of "full compliance", in which citizens fully follow the laws and policies of a society – are different than the ones Rose is making.[73] Thus, Rose can't just appeal to a given "off the shelf" Rawlsian response in favor of the normative import of "ideal theory" (leaving aside how good such a response might be), without saying more about why such a response is relevant given the idealizations she is making, and given the normative debates in which she aims to make an intervention.[74]

As I noted above, and which Rose emphasizes, it might well be that all (or at least many) current societies are *very* far from being in a position to satisfy the conditions in which (according to the framework she develops) it would be permissible to eschew pursuing further economic growth. For example, as she discusses, it might well be that current societies need to do *a lot* more in terms of helping to increase the well-being of the global poor to meet the "sufficient" bar for well-being that she discusses. Moreover, it might well be – as I think is very likely the case – that there is no remotely feasible way to raise the levels of well-being of the global poor

[73]For discussion of some of the different key idealizations made in "ideal theory" in political philosophy, see (Valentini 2012), (Stemplowska and Swift 2012), and (Enoch 2018).
[74]For connected discussion, see (Enoch 2018), (Enoch 2015), and (Enoch 2005).

in the significant way that is required by justice without continued economic growth. So the point here is not that Rose needs to show us why her idealized model delivers the result that, in our current circumstances, there are societies that are permitted (from the point of justice) to eschew the pursuit of further economic growth. Rather, it is that she needs to say something more about why her idealizations bear on *any* significant normative debate about what societies in worlds like ours might be permitted to do (from the point of view of justice) – e.g. perhaps her idealizations bear on what societies in the actual world, at some point down the line, might be able to do, or function as a kind of *normative ideal* that societies should pursue. The point is just that without saying more, it's unclear how her idealized model bears on the meaningful normative debates at hand (with which she aims to engage) about the politics of economic growth.

To be clear: it's not that I think Rose has no options here concerning what to say on this last point, or concerning what to say about the role of idealizations in her argument. Indeed, I think she does. For example, consider that, as I have emphasized now at multiple junctures, Rose is *already* putting forward potential mechanisms (tied to her take on the best social science research) that might well be promising ways to promote important goods that matter for justice. If she emphasizes this strand of her work, it would open up a number of ways to think about the kinds of idealizations she should make, and why those idealizations don't vitiate the normative relevance of her arguments to the debates at hand. Moreover, I think there are further things Rose could say about the role of abstract models and the kinds of idealizations that play a role in her argument, which would also connect (in a more indirect way) her work to normative debates about actual societies, in the actual world. The basic point here, however, is just that more needs to be said on this front to make this kind of connection – or else more on why such a connection is unnecessary for her work to have normative import of some kind, relative to the debate on the politics of economic growth. Whatever way she chooses to go, Rose needs to say more about what kinds of idealizations she is making, and why.

How demanding is justice, and what role should it have in our normative theorizing?

I now want to explicitly bring out one more important issue for Rose's discussion, and for future work on the value of economic growth, which I've

briefly touched on a few times in my discussion. This issue concerns how demanding justice is as a normative standard. In turn, this raises a further issue about what role theorizing about justice should have in our more general normative theorizing about society and politics.

Let's start with the first issue, about the demandingness of justice. To see what this issue involves, consider that, in her paper, Rose attempts to show that it's possible (in some sense of "possible") that certain mechanisms can deliver goods that matter to a just society, without relying on continued economic growth. To show that a just society can be permitted (from the standpoint of justice) to eschew further economic growth, we need to not just know that there are some mechanisms (other than continued economic growth) that can promote the relevant goods that justice requires. As Rose's discussion underscores (in her emphasis on the comparative aspect of meeting the "better off challenge" and the opportunity prong of the "innovation challenge") we also need to know that it's permitted (from the standpoint of justice) for a society to choose not to utilize *both* the mechanisms that Rose cites and the pursuit of economic growth. This issue is pressing given that, in general, if one can have more of a good thing by ϕ-ing without any additional downsides to ϕ-ing, then (other things being equal) it seems that one should ϕ. Once we rule out some of the main potential negative consequences of economic growth that Rose stipulates away in her discussion, what reasons against pursuing economic growth are we left with in the context of Rose's discussion? If we don't have any, then there is (at least prima facie) significant pressure to think that it's *not* actually permitted (from the standpoint of justice) to not pursue further economic growth, at least in the (highly idealized) circumstances Rose seems to be asking us to consider.[75]

This pressure might not, however, be conclusive. For perhaps it turns out that beyond a given threshold, potentially *massive* gains in certain goods (including well-being) that might be realized by further economic growth are, strictly speaking, optional or "supererogatory" for that society to pursue (at least from the standpoint of justice). That might of course be true. But we'd then need a good argument for why it is. This is especially so given that the goods in question seem to be central to what justice

[75]A quick (though certainly not conclusive) argument for the general idea behind this is as follows. At least prima facie, it is plausible that if a society has weighty normative reasons to ϕ, but lacks weighty normative reasons against ϕ-ing, it's far from clear why it should be permitted not to ϕ. If the normative reasons at issue are ones that are closely tied to the promotion of goods that matter for the promotion of justice, then there is at least some pressure to think that that there is reason to doubt that justice permits not ϕ-ing.

demands, and given that justice is often assumed (including, I take it, by Rose) to be very important for determining what societies should authoritatively do, all-things-considered. This combination of things points to the plausibility of the idea that justice *is* relatively demanding with respect to the continued promotion of future well-being, and isn't just a standard that involves satisfying a certain threshold here.[76]

Finally, if justice is *not* relatively demanding here, we should then start to wonder about its normative significance. We can frame the issue with the terminology of "authoritative normativity" that I used in the introduction. Put roughly, that terminology is meant to pick out the cluster of norms and values concerning such things as what people "really and truly" should do, what is "genuinely" valuable, what kinds of considerations or reasons support how institutions "really and truly" should operate, all-things-considered, etc.[77] For suppose that justice is really not that demanding in terms of what it requires for the promotion of well-being, but that the continued promotion of well-being (beyond whatever threshold is required by justice) is *very* normatively important in terms of what we "really and truly should do". In such a case, we might then conclude the following: even if *justice* as such doesn't require societies to promote further well-being, they might still *authoritatively* be required to do so. In turn, we might then conclude that focusing too much on justice – at the exclusion of the consideration of other values, norms, virtues, etc. – might prevent us from addressing many of the core normative issues that really matter in thinking about the politics of economic growth.[78]

To illustrate how this might go, suppose that justice, as Rawls maintains, sets a necessary threshold for any society to meet, which (if it does not) should be rejected as normatively insufficient in a deep way.[79] Moreover, suppose justice *only* demands that societies meet a

[76]It should be noted that, at this juncture, one might of course appeal to a specific theory of justice to help motivate the line under consideration. For example, suppose one thinks that justice just involves setting certain kinds of deontological constraints on what a society can't do, or that (in general) justice doesn't involve any norms instructing societies to maximize any goods and just requires them to promote them to a certain level. Such a theory might well support the line of argument I am putting pressure on. To make this line of argument, however, one would need to depart from Rose's relative neutrality on which theory of justice she is working with (among a range of ones she takes to be relatively plausible), and instead embrace a relatively specific theory of justice. How the arguments go from there will then obviously depend on the details of which theory of justice one embraces, and on whether it is correct.

[77]See (McPherson and Plunkett 2017) and (McPherson 2018).

[78]For connected discussion about justice, tied to issues about the moral status of non-human animals and what that means for normative theorizing in social/political philosophy, see (Plunkett 2016).

[79]This is one way of taking (at least a core part of) what Rawls is getting at in his famous statement (from the start of *A Theory of Justice*) that "Justice is the first virtue of social institutions, as truth is of systems

relevant threshold and then is silent with respect to further evaluative and normative questions about societies beyond that threshold. On such a view, once a society meets the relevant threshold, justice as such doesn't prescribe doing anything further whatsoever, doesn't say what would be more or less valuable for a society to do, etc. Depending on what that threshold involves, this sort of view might be one on which justice is not that demanding in what it requires with respect to the promotion of well-being. But even if that is so, that still leaves entirely open the question of what societies *authoritatively* should do, or what they are *authoritatively* permitted to do, given all the norms, values, and virtues that matter.

What all of this brings out is that, insofar as Rose (or anyone else) wants to illuminate normative questions about what societies are *authoritatively permitted* to do with respect to economic growth, let alone what they *authoritatively should* do with respect to it, we can't just rely on questions about what is required by justice, or what is supererogatory from the standpoint of justice. Instead, we need to know about more things than justice, regardless of how demanding justice turns out to be along different dimensions (e.g. in terms of what it demands in terms of the promotion of well-being).

Conclusion

In "The Value of Economic Growth", Rose gives us something akin to a "possibility proof" of how a society could meet at least certain demands of justice without the pursuit of continual economic growth. More specifically, she does so with respect to the specific sets of goods that are required by justice, according to three important, independent lines of argument (i.e. the three "challenges" she discusses). With this framing in mind, one can see the issues I've raised in this paper as pressing on what *kind* of possibility proof she is really offering us, and how helpful it is with respect to the normative debates surrounding the value of economic growth to which Rose aims to contribute. By raising these issues, I hope to have helped us clarify some of what it would take to show that Rose's possibility proof could illuminate what justice requires of (either present or future) actual societies in the actual world, or ones in possible worlds similar to the actual world in key respects. Finally, I also hope to

of thought. A theory however elegant and economical must be rejected or revised if it is untrue; likewise laws and institutions no matter how efficient and well-arranged must be reformed or abolished if they are unjust." (Rawls 1971/1999, 3).

have helped us appreciate the way in which this discussion should be situated within a broader one – namely, not just about what justice requires (or what it recommends), but one about the *authoritative* standards that govern how we should set up and run our social/political institutions.

In conclusion, I'd briefly like to highlight an important point about this paper, which has been an undercurrent throughout my whole discussion, and which I explicitly foregrounded in my initial framing of my discussion of Rose (when I flagged that this discussion could be seen in part as a sort of detailed case study about the relevance of general methodological issues for work in political philosophy). This point is that many of the key issues I am raising about Rose's argument in this paper generalize to *many* discussions in contemporary normative social/political philosophy. Put at a relatively high level of abstraction, the issues I've been discussing include the following cluster of interconnected issues: (a) the range of goods that are discussed in evaluating arguments about what justice requires (or what it recommends, forbids, etc.), and why; (b) how effective (both in absolute and relative terms) certain mechanisms are for delivering key goods that matter for the pursuit of justice; (c) what kinds of possibilities are being considered, and why; (d) what kinds of idealizations are being used, and why; and (e) how demanding justice is as a value (or standard), and what this means for the roles we should (and should not) give it in our normative theorizing about social/political institutions, especially if we are ultimately concerned with questions about what those institutions *authoritatively* should do, or what they *authoritatively* should be like. These are all general issues that come up in many areas of social/political philosophy, ranging from discussions about more "applied" issues, such as climate change, racial discrimination, animal rights, free speech, and criminal law, to ones about more "general" issues, such as the nature of justice, equality, and democracy. How these issues show up in these different discussions will, of course, vary a great deal between discussions. However, we are also likely to see some shared patterns. If my work in this paper is on the right track, it brings out some ways that paying careful attention to certain methodological issues while pursuing work in normative social/political philosophy can help us better understand, evaluate, and situate arguments in this area. Thus, I hope that my work in this paper can serve not only as a contribution to future discussion on the politics of economic growth – including, I hope, future work by Rose on this topic – but also as a case study that can prove

useful for those working in a range of other topics in social/political philosophy.

Acknowledgments

Thanks to Sonu Bedi, Mark Budolfson, Herman Cappelen, John Cho, Jorah Dannenberg, David Enoch, Jesse Ferraioli, Jonah Hirsch, Nithya Kasarla, Zachary Lang, Amanda Li, Barry Maguire, Matt McKeever, Tristram McPherson, Yascha Mounk, Russ Muirhead, Jonathan Phillips, Adam Plunkett, Julie Rose, Becca Rothfeld, Adrian Russian, Wendy Salkin, Lucas Stanczyk, Jeff Weintraub, and anonymous referees for helpful discussion and feedback. This paper grew out of comments I presented (on a draft of Julie Rose's paper "The Value of Economic Growth") at a workshop on economic justice at Dartmouth College in 2017, which was organized by Julie Rose. Thanks to all the participants in that workshop for helpful discussion, and to Julie Rose for inviting me to comment on her paper.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

WORKS CITED

Anderson, Elizabeth. 2017. "The Problem of Equality from a Political Economy Perspective." In *Oxford Studies in Political Philosophy*, vol. 3, edited by D. Sobel, P. Vallentyne, and S. Wall, 36–57. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Appiah, Kwame Anthony. 2017. *As If: Idealization and Ideals*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Cowen, Tyler. 2018. *Stubborn Attachments: A Vision for a Society of Free, Prosperous, and Responsible Individuals*. San Francisco: Stripe Press.

Deaton, Angus. 2013. *The Great Escape: Health, Wealth, and the Origins of Inequality*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Diamond, Jared. 1999. "The Worst Mistake in the History of the Human Race." *Discover* 64–66.

Enoch, David. 2005. "Why Idealize?" *Ethics* 115 (4): 759–787.

Enoch, David. 2015. "Against Public Reason." In *Oxford Studies in Political Philosophy*, Volume 1, edited by D. Sobel, P. Vallentyne, and S. Wall, 112–144. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Enoch, David. 2018. "Against Utopianism: Noncompliance and Multiple Agents." *Philosophers' Imprint* 18 (16): 1–20.

Enoch, David. 2019. "Is General Jurisprudence Interesting?" In *Dimensions of Normativity: New Essays on Metaethics and Jurisprudence*, edited by D. Plunkett, S. Shapiro, and K. Toh, 65–86. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Freeman, Samuel. 2007a. *Justice and the Social Contract: Essays on Rawlsian Political Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Freeman, Samuel. 2007b. *Rawls*. New York: Routledge.
Friedman, Benjamin. 2005. *The Moral Consequences of Economic Growth*. New York: Vintage.
Galston, William A. 2014. *The New Challenge to Market Democracies: The Political and Social Costs of Economic Stagnation*. Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press.
Godfrey-Smith, Peter. 2006. "The Strategy of Model-Based Science." *Biology and Philosophy* 21 (5): 725–740.
McKibben, Bill. 1989. *The End of Nature*. New York: Random House.
McKibben, Bill. 2007. *Deep Economy: The Wealth of Communities and the Durable Future*. New York: St Martin's Griffin.
McPherson, Tristram. 2018. "Authoritatively Normative Concepts." In *Oxford Studies in Metaethics*, Vol. 13, edited by R. Shafer-Landau, 253–277. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
McPherson, Tristram, and David Plunkett. 2017. "The Nature and Explanatory Ambitions of Metaethics." In *The Routledge Handbook of Metaethics*, edited by T. McPherson, and D. Plunkett, 1–25. New York: Routledge.
Mounk, Yascha. 2018. *The People vs. Democracy: Why Our Freedom Is in Danger and How to Save It*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Phillips, Jonathan, and Joshua Knobe. 2018. "The Psychological Representation of Modality." *Mind and Language* 33 (1): 65–94.
Phillips, Jonathan, Adam Morris, and Fiery Cushman. 2019. "How We Know What Not To Think." *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 23 (12): 1026–1040.
Piketty, Thomas. 2013. *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Pinker, Steven. 2018. *Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism, and Progress*. New York: Penguin.
Plunkett, David. 2016. "Justice, Non-Human Animals, and the Methodology of Political Philosophy." *Jurisprudence* 7 (1): 1–29.
Plunkett, David. 2019. "Robust Normativity, Morality, and Legal Positivism." In *Dimensions of Normativity: New Essays on Metaethics and General Jurisprudence*, edited by D. Plunkett, S. Shapiro, and K. Toh, 105–136. New York City: Oxford University Press.
Railton, Peter. 1984. "Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality." *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 13: 134–171.
Rawls, John. 1971/1999. *A Theory of Justice*. revised edition. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Rawls, John. 1996. *Political Liberalism*. expanded edition. New York: Columbia University Press.
Rawls, John. 1999. *The Law of Peoples*. Cambridge: Mass.: Harvard University Press.
Rose, Julie L. 2016. *Free Time*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
Rose, Julie L. 2020. "On the Value of Economic Growth." *Politics, Philosophy and Economics* 19 (2): 128–153.
Rose, Julie L. Forthcoming. "Beyond the Perpetual Pursuit of Economic Growth." In *Political Economy and Justice*, edited by D. Allen, Y. Benkler, L. Downey, R. Henderson, and J. Simons. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. 1755/1997. "Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality Among Men." In *The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings*, edited by V. Gourevitch, 115–193. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Scheidel, Walter. 2017. *The Great Leveler: Violence and the History of Inequality from the Stone Age to the Twenty-First Century*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Scott, James C. 2017. *Against the Grain: A Deep History of the Earliest States*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Sebo, Jeff. 2021. "Animals and Climate Change." In *Philosophy and Climate Change*, edited by M. Budolfson, T. McPherson, and D. Plunkett, 42–66. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Southwood, Nicholas. 2018. "The Feasibility Issue." *Philosophy Compass* 13 (8): e12509.

Stemplowska, Zofia, and Adam Swift. 2012. "Ideal and Non-Ideal Theory." In *The Oxford Handbook of Political Philosophy*, edited by D. Estlund, 373–388. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Turner, Jack. 1996. *The Abstract Wild*. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press.

Valentini, Laura. 2012. "Ideal vs. Non-Ideal Theory: A Conceptual Map." *Philosophy Compass* 7 (9): 654–664.

Wallace-Wells, David. 2019. *The Uninhabitable Earth: Life After Warming*. New York: Random House.

Weisberg, Michael. 2013. *Simulation and Similarity: Using Models to Understand the World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Wodak, Daniel. 2019. "Fictional Normativity and Normative Authority." *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 49 (6): 828–850.

Yalcin, Seth. 2018. "Semantics as Model-Based Science." In *The Science of Meaning: Essays on the Metatheory of Natural Language Semantics*, edited by D. Ball, and B. Rabern, 334–360. Oxford: Oxford University Press.