

**BOOK REVIEW**

**PASI HEIKKURINEN. DEGROWTH. AN EXPERIENCE OF BEING FINITE.**

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In his thought-provoking book, *Degrowth. An Experience of Being Finite* (2024), Pasi Heikkurinen shares his insightful philosophical reflections on degrowth as an existential experience. By degrowth Heikkurinen understands not an economic and social set of practices which we should develop in narrow terms, but a complex *modus vivendi*. The latter is recognized as a lifeworld that can be experienced by multiple degrowthers (see p. 112) who act as releasers in an elaborated Heideggerian sense (see pp. 71-73). The degrowthers as such are not simply deniers of growth but belong to a particular group of transformers who go through “a metamorphosis in being” (p. 113). Consequently, the significance of the practical outcomes of their metamorphosis concerns the unique experience of degrowth, being internalized as an “experience of finitude”—as “a deep (embodied) understanding that everything has limits” (p. 113) due to which being degrowth and degrowth being function as “more than practices” (p. 112). Furthermore, the ontologically set two modes of degrowth above are refracted through the lens of a specific eco-phenomenology. Its major objective is to reveal how the “holistic existential turnaround: being degrowth” (p. 10) transforms degrowth being into a mode of becoming for those who test the experiential limits of finitude.

Beginning with what he calls a minimalist definition of degrowth as a reduction of matter-energy throughput (see p. 17), Heikkurinen divides his seven chapter-book into three main themes—technology (Chapters 1-2), change (Chapters 3-4) and nature (Chapters 5-6) (see p. 8). Regarding the ontological and eco-phenomenological reasons behind the analysis of these topics, one can also outline another functional triplet addressing the “three grand themes” above (p. 8), viz., that of diagnosis-prognosis-treatment disenchanting the degrowth’s philosophical gist and its transformations.

The first component of the triplet in question is the diagnosis of degrowth as *modus vivendi*. This diagnosis sheds light on the challenges of reducing matter-energy throughput triggered by the growth culture and the technological mode of being (Chapter 1), as well as outlines the need of providing an antidote to such a culture through which technological enframing can be “released” in favor of unfolding the world’s complex genesis (Chapter 2). In turn, defining degrowth as a reduction of the matter-energy throughput occurs as a natural counter-action to the human exosomatic turn whose climax is the uncontrollable use of technology in the neo-liberal techno-capitalism (see pp. 82-83) (Chapter 5).

Ecological unsustainability itself is recognized as brought about by the growth culture that justifies a technological mode of being as a result of the exosomatic turn. Thus, by elaborating on Heidegger’s view of enframing, Heikkurinen clarifies why ontological realm of technology is determined by a particular type of both ontological and epistemic gradualism (see p. 28). Specifically, Heikkurinen analyzes why the exosomatic turn is not conducted once and for all but remains dependent on the functioning of the gradualism above. Practically speaking, the turn in question is recognized as addressing the gradual amalgamating of higher- and lower-technology practices (see p. 27) that make some cultures more distant to the core of nature than others (see p. 94).

However, providing such a negative diagnosis of techno-capitalist cultures as “more distant” is only one side of the coin. It also has its ‘positive’ embodiments, as displayed by Heikkurinen’s appeal for a moral transformation necessitated by the ontological clarifications above. The positive diagnosis of degrowth as needing a new “ethos of releasement” (p. 35) fosters the introduction of “a new moral agency capable of withdrawing from technological practices” (p. 35). This agency does not prescribe enframing of practice as such, but conducting a morally responsible behavior of letting things be.

Consequently, Heikkurinen sees the positive normative potential of releasement in the Heideggerian sense in how it breaks from the calculative (technocratic) thinking in favor of a meditative thinking that makes space for new modes of relating (see p. 37). It is this “non-technologically dominated ethos” (p. 39) that meets Heikkurinen’s definition of “ethos for degrowth” (p. 42); an ethos that assigns a high moral value to the “openness to releasement” (p. 42) as a moral agency. In turn, the latter is considered ‘moral’ due to allowing non-humans to manifest their nature rather than being a standing-reserve in the Heideggerian sense (see p.

42). Last but not least, one of the major ethical benefits of adopting the ethos of degrowth is that it prevents the increase in the overall metabolic load fostered by the accelerating transformation of human-made objects into new ones (see p. 47).

Second, one can point out Heikkurinen's prognosis of what could be done, as embedded into two mutually related ontological processes. These are transforming the so-called ontic degrowth that addresses the actual reduction of matter-energy throughput for the sake of unfolding degrowth ontology behind (p. 54) (Chapter 3) and metamorphosing both the ontological and epistemic groundings of liberal economy by reevaluating "the different degrees of the will to transform" (p. 78) (Chapter 4).

Transforming as such is "a phenomenological response for triggering profound changes..." (p. 50) necessitated by what Heikkurinen calls the will-to-transform. Elaborating on Nietzsche's concept of the will-to-power (see p. 51), Heikkurinen argues that the latter can also affect the will-to-transform, which in turn shares some similarities with the will to art (techne) (see p. 62). Furthermore, Heikkurinen cogently defines the dialectical tension between the mutually related aspects of the will-to-transform as "the transformation paradox" (p. 51). He emphasizes that this paradox derives from the way "humans experience an urgency to transform the world" and the transformation as a key condition of the current ecospherical crisis (see p. 51).

Specifically, the origin of the transformation paradox can be traced back to "the thermodynamic fact" that all human-induced transformations foster further transformations of non-humans (see p. 56). The paradox remains when one simply reforms the narratives about the actions of transformation by appealing for the replacement of "bad transformations" with "good" ones (see p. 56). The reason is that replacing is a process of reforming that relies on rearranging the form, but not on transforming that should change the form itself (see p. 53).

Heikkurinen outlines two different genealogies of transformation underlain by the associated process ontologies, viz., that of human-induced modifications of the form, assuming both reformation and transformation, and that of metamorphosis, addressing the complexity of non-anthropogenic transformations (see p. 53). In this context, Heikkurinen profoundly outlines the limits of degrowth ontology that necessitates metamorphosing as a matter of gestalt switch (see p. 54). It remains irreducible to the ontic degrowth's transformations since they are triggered mainly by the ontic intention of merely reducing the matter-energy throughput (see p.

54). One of the significant contributions of reevaluating the complex genesis of degrowth ontology is that it sheds light on transforming the well-known environmentalist slogan “think globally, act locally” into that of “think local; reflect; think global” (p. 58).

In addition, introducing the concept of metamorphosis, as refracted through the lens of process ontology and eco-phenomenology, also contributes to normatively grounding the moral duties and responsibilities of the agents who internalize the degrowth practices in existential terms. They are supposed not only to act, but also to “dwell degrowth” (p. 113) as an “experience of being finite” (p. 114). While reconstructing the normatively grounded status of the degrowthers beyond the plausible idea that they are simply deniers of growth, Heikkurinen points out that the processes of metamorphosis assume elaborating the so-called aporia of the transition to non-willing(ness) (see p. 69). This means that the tension of the transformation paradox can be overcome only aporetically, viz., by modifying the will-to-transform into a particular type of non-willingness, which, however, is not deprived of a performative potential.

As Heikkurinen argues, “the ontological metamorphosis, which includes releasement is indispensable for the degrowth movement” (p. 70). However, the existential shift from “being a transformer to becoming a releaser is not something that can be forced” (p. 71). Such a metamorphosis is underlain by a transformation regarding the replacement of willingness to both transform and reform with non-willingness of a new type. The latter is understood as “waiting without an object, as well as preparing for the expected, the collapse of matter-energetically intensive cultures” (p. 67).

Elaborating on Heidegger’s concept of releasement, Heikkurinen introduces a broader notion of agency including cultures. This means that not only humans but also cultures are defined as releasers—as “practitioners of letting-be as they allow beings to unfold their complex genesis rather than considering them a standing-reserve to be transformed for anthropocentric, human purposes...” (p. 69). Furthermore, the extended concept of agency assumes the reconsideration of the normative validity and limits of moral autonomy in the degrowth discourse since the distribution of responsibility and assigning blame (see p. 70) requires ethical gradualism. Such gradualism fosters a particular type of moral engagement because one’s non-willingness to interfere and letting things be is ethically impossible, unless moral agents consciously restrain from harmful practices to other humans and non-humans. In other words, one may argue that degrowth recognized as an experience of being finite assumes not only

cultivating sensitivity towards complex otherness as a matter of conducting responsible moral behavior, but also appreciating human awareness of the limits of their own moral agency.

Considering that prognosis is made for the purposes of providing a relevant, practice-related treatment, Heikkurinen's outcomes, as displayed in Chapters 6-7 can be interpreted as hints to what meaningful degrowth 'treatment' should look like; specifically, how philosophical and eco-phenomenological reasons of introducing degrowth can be applied by the releasers of degrowth as such.

The particular 'treatment' recommendations are formulated in the last, seventh chapter of the book in which Heikkurinen outlines five major implications. They address the recognition of the so-called proof of the real (p. 104) that encourages intersubjectivity as increasing the realness of the experience (the first implication); the reevaluation of the "culture-nature metabolism" (p. 103) being a guiding agency in degrowth movement's initiatives (the second implication); the rejection of over-inclusiveness and "degrowth to the max" formula (p. 106) as vague and unrealistic (the third implication); the refraction of degrowth through the lens of process ontology as a matter of degrowing which is constantly limiting both itself and our way of living (the forth implication) and the introduction of cosmology of degrowth resulting from the so-called cosmic turn that positively affects our holistic self-understanding (p. 109) (the fifth implication).

Furthermore, the complex reasons for the existential imperativeness of the implications above can be found in Heikkurinen's enlightening analysis of the degrowth's processes in the Whiteheadian sense. Heikkurinen emphasizes the reconsideration of degrowth's spatio-temporality by outlining an innovative vision of the core of nature; specifically, by disenchanting its past and future over-representations in favor of the so-called meta-modern presentism (see p. 97, p. 101).

In this context, Heikkurinen encourages us to realize that internalizing degrowth as being degrowth and degrowth being is possible only if/when one avoids not only the "past-istic" romanticizing of nature as wild and organic, but also the postmodernist, futuristic desirability of amalgamating boundaries between humans and nature (see pp. 95-99). The existential significance of "the core of nature as present" is what makes us "being-in-nature" (p. 100); it is a process of constant balancing rather than a state of balance regarding human-nature relationships. As Heikkurinen cogently points out, humans are not only thrown in the

world, as hinted by Heidegger, but also in the process of nature, as Whitehead argued: “Humans and other earthbound beings are thrown into nature, where we learn to be” (p. 100).

By contrast to the majority of books on degrowth providing future-oriented vocabularies that serve as guidelines in showing why ‘less’ growth is better than ‘more’ growth, Heikkurinen’s monograph *Degrowth. An Experience of Being Finite* offers an eco-phenomenological prognosis, viz., how degrowth can be internalized and developed as *modus vivendi* whose essence is both anticipating and practicing the way of being (finite)-in-nature. Furthermore, Heikkurinen’s appeal for dwelling degrowth as a metamorphosis of (finite) being can be interpreted as *pro-gnosis* (πρόγνωσις) (fore-knowledge) in the sense of *phronesis* (φρόνησις) understood as practical wisdom. Such a conceptualization of experiential wisdom aligns with Heikkurinen’s meta-modern view of the core of nature as the present (p. 97). It shows that if our being-in-nature is subjected to a phronetic prognosis, fore-knowledge does not precede knowledge in temporal terms. On the contrary, it is already present, but still unseen and unrecognizable, unless degrowth’s unique genesis is wisely taken into consideration.

Specifically, degrowth wisdom internalized as wisdom to (finitely) dwell concerns the way of testing limits as an experiential testing that is closely tied with our moral (self-)obligation to respect the culture-nature metabolic flow. Thus, the major challenge of the testing above is how dwelling degrowth as a mode of being can turn into a mode of becoming. The latter can be experienced as a metamorphosis “with our soul and cells” (p. 112) in an existentially integrating manner, viz., as an intersubjective experience of being finite that can engage us with the core of nature as wise releasers rather than as anthropocentric reformers.