

# Does Degrowth endanger Democracy?!

An answer to Benjamin Friedman's »The moral consequences of economic growth, New York, 2005«.

## Benjamin Friedman's thesis

Humans compare their standard of living with others.

If their standard ranks lower, they will develop negative attitudes against fellow humans.

If there is hope that the standard will get better by time, the comparison is less important.

## Benjamin Friedman's conclusion

In times of poor growth intolerance and xenophobia increase and endanger democracy.

## Objection

Economic growth itself increases inequality, so many people rank lower than others by its direct consequences.

## Benjamin Friedman's reply

Friedman agrees to that fact but changes the topic:

He points to the successful fight of growth against absolute poverty.

## Objection

1. Intolerance and xenophobia in modern societies arise from precarious living conditions, for example because of the competition on labour-markets. The breeding ground for anti-democratic attitudes in western societies is not absolute poverty, but the working conditions in unequal and competitive societies based on economic growth.

2. Comparing standards of living might not only arise from an anthropologic dimension, but might also be a specific cultural effect of the consumistic conditions in societies based on economic growth.

## Conclusion 1

An explanation of human behaviour in relation to economic growth has to reflect the social position of humans in a society based on economic growth instead of referring to an anthropological dimension directly.

## Conclusion 2

Even though economic growth produces wealth, it puts people into generally precarious positions: Their social participation depends on the money they earn in competition to each other and inevitably assumes the shape of consumption in a nearly all-encompassing market society based on economic growth.

## Conclusion 3

In a society based on economic growth people are forced into conformity with markets, making their social lives and participation depending on individual economic success and at the same time shaping life and participation into commercial ways. Competition in standards of living is - just like modern anti-democratic attitudes - a result of the generally precarious social position in a market society based on economic growth.

**Could alternative modes of economic activity convert the social-economic mechanisms of integration and participation in a manner that does not permanently reproduce latent precarity? Could the imperative to attenuate that precarity by economic growth to preserve democracy be diminished by this way?**