

IMAGINE



“... a system that is democratic and equitable, organized and carried out to fulfill human needs in ways that regenerate and maintain a healthy biosphere.”

— Fred Magdoff & Chris Williams, *Creating an Ecological Society: toward a revolutionary transformation*

Welcome to Issue 4 of Imagine, an occasional pamphlet devoted to envisioning what a better world could be like and ways we can make it real. If we cannot imagine a better world, no path will take us there. This vision is a work in progress — we welcome your ideas for consideration and discussion (email is below). Future issues of Imagine will continue to expand on the vision and contemplate making it happen.

Valuing Caring and Freedom

When we talk about our principles and commitments, we often speak of our “values.” The things that matter to us are reflected in what we value and how we value it. Value is not merely personal, but social; we need to reflect on how assignments of value are built into our society and its economic and political systems and the influence these assignments have on how we view the world. To create a better world, or even envision one, we must first change our definition of value.

Ultimately, the source of all value is time. We have only a finite amount of time to live, so we want to spend it as meaningfully as possible, on the things we care about and that give us joy. Time is precious because time that is lost will never be regained; we don’t get a life extension to make up for the time we waste.

We are free to the extent we can devote our time to the things we care about, and unfree to the extent we must spend our time on work chosen and directed by others. However, freedom cannot be achieved on an individual basis, because what we care about, our passions

and commitments, always depend on others. Nothing matters unless it touches the life of someone else. All living things need care, as do those things that support life, and we are devoted to caring for those things and people we love (including ourselves). Whatever we do freely, whether it is creating a work of art, conducting a scientific investigation, restoring a wetland, or cooking food for our families, it matters to us because it enriches the lives of those around us. They, in turn, enrich our own lives. Freedom consists of the ability to determine collectively how we spend our lives together.

It’s hard to imagine a surer sign that one is dealing with an irrational economic system than the fact that the prospect of eliminating drudgery is considered to be a problem.

— David Graeber, *Bullshit Jobs: A Theory*

What use of time does our society value? Our society assigns value to things based on how much they can be bought and sold for. What we produce is determined primarily by

what can be sold for the most profit by those who own or control the necessary facilities and resources. In order for owners and investors to make a profit, most of us must work for them in order to earn the ability to consume what we produce. Since we don't determine the purpose of work done for a wage or salary, we are not free during the time we spend doing it. The owners have more power and autonomy, but they are not truly free either, because to survive in the market they are governed by the need to make a profit.

Most of what we consume does not further our own ends either but instead goes to restoring our ability to work the next day. We eat to restore our bodies, and we consume leisure products to restore our energy after the draining day at work. We have little time or energy for what we really care about.

Furthermore, as productivity increases due to improvements in technology, instead of everyone working less and having more free time, more work must be created and more goods and services must be produced and sold in order for profits to continue accumulating. If the economy doesn't grow, unemployment does. This is a surefire recipe for turning people into drones and a living planet into a heap of dead products. Our economy is, quite literally, a death machine.

Of course, the picture above is an oversimplification. Some institutions, such as schools

and hospitals, are bureaucratic and not entirely subject to market forces. Not all work is unfulfilling: teachers care about educating their students, researchers care about developing new knowledge, doctors and nurses care about healing their patients, carpenters care about building houses. But much of our lives is spent working to consume and consuming to work. In essence, what our society values is not time spent freely but time spent producing goods and services to be sold for profit.

What if, as Martin Hägglund suggests in [This Life: Secular Faith and Spiritual Freedom](#), we instead valued – that is, the structure of our social system valued – the time we had available to spend freely? What if we produced only what we needed to take care of each other and do the things that really mattered to us, using our inventiveness to make the work needed to do this as enjoyable and efficient as possible? Since this work would support what we freely care about, even the time we spend on it would no longer be stolen from our lives. What if, as David Graeber has suggested, we throw out the notions of production and consumption, and instead think in terms of caring and freedom?

What would a world that valued real freedom look like? How can we get there? Think about it! We'd love to hear from you. And of course we will come back to this!

Commonwealth

“A commonwealth might be an economy where no one gets their living by degrading someone else, nor by degrading the health of the land or the larger living world. In such a community, the flourishing of everyone and everything would sustain the flourishing of each person. This would be a way of living in deep reciprocity as well as deep equality. The

freedom of that community would not be freedom from the consequences of your actions. It would not be freedom from dependence on others, or from responsibility for them. It would be the freedom of being able to approve the results of what you do, to own your responsibilities and dependences without too much grief or resentment.” — [This Land is Our Land: The Struggle for a New Commonwealth](#), by Jedediah Purdy

“If you cannot see yourself in the purpose of your occupation, then your labor time is alienated, even if your job entails a high salary and great social prestige.” — Martin Hägglund