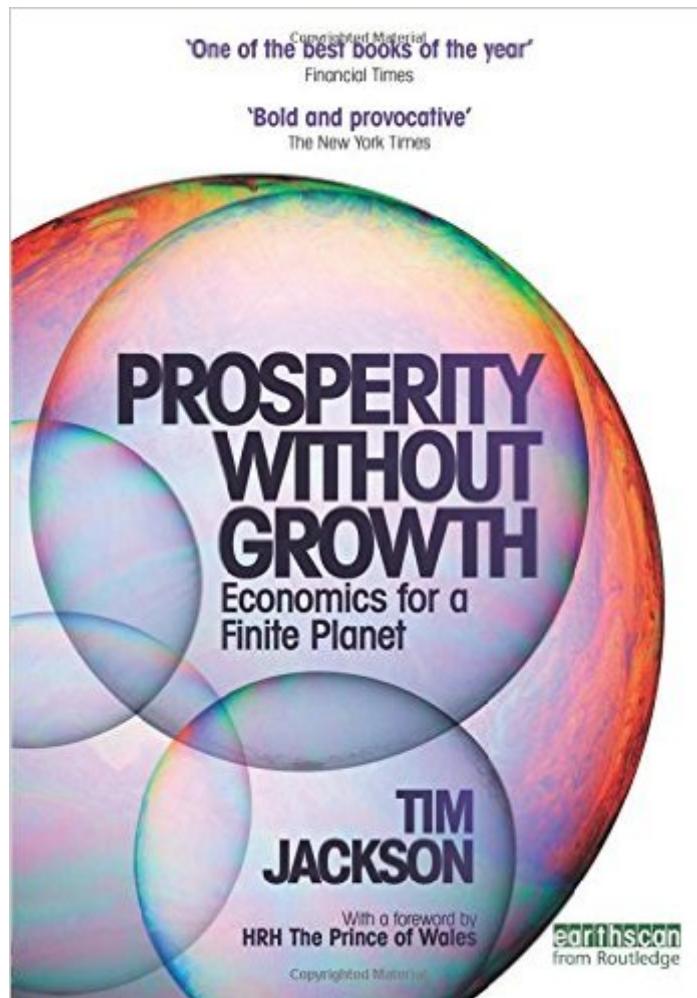


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# Prosperity Without Growth: Economics For A Finite Planet



## **Synopsis**

Is more economic growth the solution? Will it deliver prosperity and well-being for a global population projected to reach nine billion? In this explosive book, Tim Jackson - a top sustainability adviser to the UK government - makes a compelling case against continued economic growth in developed nations. No one denies that development is essential for poorer nations. But in the advanced economies there is mounting evidence that ever-increasing consumption adds little to human happiness and may even impede it. More urgently, it is now clear that the ecosystems that sustain our economies are collapsing under the impacts of rising consumption. Unless we can radically lower the environmental impact of economic activity - and there is no evidence to suggest that we can - we will have to devise a path to prosperity that does not rely on continued growth. Economic heresy? Or an opportunity to improve the sources of well-being, creativity and lasting prosperity that lie outside the realm of the market? Tim Jackson provides a credible vision of how human society can flourish - within the ecological limits of a finite planet. Fulfilling this vision is simply the most urgent task of our times. This book is a substantially revised and updated version of Jackson's controversial study for the Sustainable Development Commission, an advisory body to the UK Government. The study rapidly became the most downloaded report in the Commission's nine year history when it was launched earlier this year.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

We can't have our cake and eat it too, according to Tim Jackson. While many (or even most) people

are convinced that "technology" and ever-increasing efficiencies will allow humankind, and especially us Rich World folks, to live green and still live large, this book demonstrates in well-documented detail the fallacy of this way of thinking. For instance, while we are getting more production for any carbon we emit into the atmosphere (25 percent more efficient globally in the past 40 years), our actual carbon output is up by 80 percent, as more people are finding more ways to burn fossil fuels--in effect overwhelming any impact from being more efficient. Jackson is thorough in documenting our overuse of important materials such as copper, bauxite and iron ore, which he points out, if the rest of the world used like we do, world supplies would be exhausted within 20 years. He is also quick to note that not only are we exhausting the planet's physical storehouse and storage capacity for things like carbon, we are at the same time driving a large wedge between the haves and have-nots of the world. And more wealth won't solve these inequities: per capita income in the US is some \$42,000 per year, yet the US has the largest income stratification of any rich nation. He blames much of our problem on "novelty"--the pursuit of the new thing. This creates a throwaway society as product after product is "up-graded" for the next model; it also creates persistent anxiety among and between citizens as they strive for acceptance and supremacy via things.

Although, as a longtime environmentalist, I'm a member of the choir that this author is preaching to, I found myself resisting much of what he was saying, and I certainly could not imagine that a gung-ho, pro-growth, climate-change skeptic would be moved by the arguments presented in this book. My main takeaway was the realization of just how far apart people can be who are supposedly on the same team. For one thing I had problems with the style and presentation of the book. The heavy use of sentence fragments made me feel I was reading an expanded PowerPoint presentation, and the pervasive presence of weasel-words like clearly is a sign of the weakness of the supporting arguments. I was frustrated with the author's fence-sitting. I was expecting to find, at a minimum, a clear alternative definition of prosperity, but this I did not get--at least, not that I can recall. Instead there were repeated statements to the effect that our future idea of prosperity will have to include such things as . . . • But the author felt that coming down too definitely on exactly what should be done, or how, was beyond the scope of what one book--his book, anyway--could do. Much of the book is concerned with providing suggestive evidence that alternative ways of measuring our economic activity and success are feasible. But too often, for my taste, this evidence consisted of the tentative findings of various social scientists, based on mushy things like opinion surveys. To me this is not a science--in any useful sense, for I have little

doubt that, like expert witnesses in court cases, other soft scientists could be found to offer à œvidenceâ • supporting different or even contradictory conclusions.

We are already at or near the ecological limits to growth of our magnificent planet. At the same time the economies of affluent nations, as presently conceived, require continuous growth to avoid collapse into recession and high unemployment. Tim Jackson's book *Prosperity without Growth*, examines this paradox in detail and presents a path toward its resolution. A first step is to examine our definitions of prosperity. A shift away from prosperity pursued as opulence -- constantly acquiring new material satisfactions -- and toward prosperity enjoyed as flourishing -- deep and enduring satisfaction and well-being -- allows us to consume less while we enjoy life more. A graph of happiness as a function of average annual income reaches a plateau as essential material needs are met. A graph of life expectancy as a function of GDP per capita reaches a similar plateau. This insight helps us recognize that paths toward increased happiness do not require more material goods. In the economies of affluent nations, competition stimulates technology improvements that increase labor productivity to reduce costs. As labor becomes more productive, fewer people are required to produce the same goods. This would lead to unemployment unless demand grows at the same rate as labor becomes more productive. If growth stops, unemployment increases, household income drops, demand drops and the system collapses toward recession. This presents the dilemma of growth:+ Growth in its present form is unsustainable -- unbounded resource consumption is exceeding environmental capacity, and+ De-growth under present conditions is unstable -- reduced consumer demand leads to increased unemployment and the spiral of recession.

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