

Transcript of Comments by Clive L. Spash on Kate Raworth's presentation of Doughnut Economics

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Clive Spash Comment 1. Length 6 minutes video available on vimeo
[This immediately followed the 30 minute presentation by Kate Raworth]

Thanks and thanks Kate for a very broad reaching presentation. There's an awful lot to cover here and an awful lot was covered and I have quite a lot of points I'd like to make which I won't have time for. So, I'll be quite quick and go through some of them.

I think one of the issues for me is not actually the thrust of the vision that Kate puts forward, but actually it's the issue about the analysis of the problem we're facing. So starting out with this whole idea of the crisis. Clearly there's a crisis, right, and 'the system' is responsible, but what is 'the system'? The elephant in the room for me is that capitalism is mentioned once only in that talk, very briefly, and written off along side socialism—as state socialism and capitalism. For me capitalism is the core of the problem in modernity. So going back to the fifteen and sixteen hundreds when we get capitalism kicking-off.

Now this raises an issue about the way that growth is discussed in terms of this presentation. So if we think about growth, Kate says at one point that "growth is a metaphor". Well, growth is not a metaphor, it's not a metaphor to advocate growth society. Growth is a social reality and it has, as was pointed out, all sorts of implications in terms of material and energy throughput for society and for the world. So growth is not a metaphor. Growth is a reality and it actually has biophysical consequences, which have been outlined in some details, but in terms of the resources and resource extraction it has implications.

And also it is not a matter of social reality being a social construct, as was mentioned. Social reality is a reality. There are real corporations, there are real firms, there is real structure. And while I am totally in favour of opening up the box and saying there is potentiality in human society, there are also limits in human society. There are only a certain number of ways in which we can organise our society—from fascist dictatorship to anarchist open societies. There's a whole range but there's a limited number. There's not an infinite number of ways that society can be organised.

And this also leads me to a contradiction, in a way, in the presentation, which is this discussion of values. You get co-creation of values. So values can be co-created, but this conflicts very strongly with the idea of needs. Needs are not co-created! Needs are fundamental.

This also, you can see this in another contradiction, which I find in the presentation, is when you start talking about how we can measure and look at the problems that we're facing. So we have growth. Growth is not a metaphor, as I said, it's a reality. But when we get to discussing the problem of growth it gets, after having been criticised, it gets reduced down to a dollar per person in a slide where we're shown that this is what people should be aspiring to, to increase

the dollar per person. Well this of course is back to the growth economy, which has been criticised.

And underlying this is a failure I find to pick-up on some fundamental messages. So Kate says this is all very new its only been around for 10 years. I'm sorry but this is basically fallacious, totally fallacious. This has not been around for 10 years. Take the circular economy, it goes back to the 1970s and ideas of social metabolism. We can go back into the late 1800s and ideas of energy and material throughput. Martinez-Alier has a book on the history of ecological economics which goes back to the 1880s.

We can go back to economic theories. So we're told: Oh! The economic theories that we've had, the economic theories did not address this. Well I'm sorry but, you know, has anybody hear of Marx? Yes, Kate's heard of Marx. Marx is cited a few times in her book. Well Marx's theory is all about crisis in capitalism, and Marx is not alone. There are other economists who have also discussed the crisis of capitalism, the problem, but the issue is that economics is dominated. There's a hegemony. There's a power relationship and power is not discussed here either.

So power and power relationships. And those power relationships also affect the type of economics we have. So the type of economics we have is, as Kate points out, the growth orientated, capitalism, capital accumulating economies. They can be capitalist but they can also be state socialist; as was also very briefly mentioned. But this is a core aspect of it. But to say that the economics has not been addressing this, it has, it has addressed it, but the theories are pushed aside due to power and power relationships.

You know this is a conference on SDGs. Kate mentioned very briefly, and I think this is quite right, that there is a real conflict within the SDGs—between [other goals and] growth and the growth orientated society, and pushing forward growth and the growth economy. You know, Goal 8.1 7% GDP growth recommended, totally in conflict with the Paris Agreement, no conceptualisation of the material and energy throughput.

I'll make two final points. One is that, you know, regarding when you say rhetorically, I think its very rhetorical to say development, there's never been such a thing as development. You have to unpack this. What does that mean? Clearly there is development. There's massive industrial, material throughput and energy development. The way that the fossil fuel economy was setup from, you know, the 1800s onwards, is very much about developing a certain type and specific type of industrial economy. And we really have to focus on that kind of history of what is the system that we're dealing with.

And then my final point is, very briefly mentioned, and I think its good that you bring in these ideas of respect and well-being and labour rights for others, but lets think about it. Bergen and other Western societies, Europe, developing countries, America, now China, India, are heavily dependent on extraction of resources, exploitation of other countries and they use military to do this. Look at the size of the military-industrial complex. Not mentioned at all! The military totally absent.

Clive Spash Comment 2. Length 4 minutes 40 seconds video available on vimeo

[This commentary followed a reply from Kate Raworth, without any speakers being asked to comment, where she produced a black shoe box with the word 'capitalism' on it and later another with 'socialism' on it, and derided all 'isms' as 20th century and useless. Next, I was asked what I thought of the following question: "How do the SDGs fit the doughnut economy model? You [Kate Raworth] mention them as social boundaries. True for some goals but economic growth and GDP is very much embedded in the SDGs. Will striving towards achieving the SDGs lead us to a society within ecological boundaries."]

No it won't. SDGs are totally conflicted. So I would say that if you're going to pursue the SDGs you can't do it. And this actually also related to the black boxes. I think that what Kate is doing is replacing the 'isms', as she calls them, with a black box of the doughnut, which isn't going to help us at all.

So, I think, relating to the SDGs then, what you need to do is analyse what the form of the economy, the structure of the economy that we're living in. The reason that people get upset when the economy stops growing is that it's a capital accumulating economy and they have to work to get a wage to actually survive. Indigenous communities do not have this same problem. And therefore the problem that we're facing is this idea that the SDGs are going to industrialise the world, they're going to create growth economies, spread the basic market, capitalist and capital accumulating economy to all economies so that they can become dollar figures and they can all suddenly become income earning, actually overrides indigenous communities. It overrides their life. It overrides the values that they hold. It overrides the ways that they are actually living already, and many are rejecting this. Right. Why are people protesting? The farmers in India protesting, Via Campesina protesting. People trying to live outside of the system but they're not allowed to, right. Because they're invaded, they're taken over, the corporations come in. And what does the SDGs do? The SDGs promotes industrialisation. You know it's got very strong statements. Not only, you know I mentioned, the goal 8.1 GDP growth, its Gross Domestic Product growth they want, right. Its not growing anything, its growing something very very particular—financial throughput. You've got the idea that development assistance is 0.7% of GNI, Gross National Income, so you have to have Gross National Income to measure it, it has to be measured this way. Goal 9.2, promote 'inclusive and sustainable industrialisation', right. This is totally against indigenous communities and the way they live and the way that people might want to live alternatively. And they have economies, they have economic structures, they have alternative economies. You know the economy must be understood not in terms of this 'isms', of social 'isms' or capital 'isms' or whatever, if you want to be derogatory about the way that we talk about these things, but you must understand what an economics structure is.

An economic structure is about social provisioning. It's providing for people. So I agree with highlighting things like needs, the needs of people. And I think that when we're talking about indigenous communities, as was said about the Sami [by President Aili Keskitalo] it's about sufficiency. The Sami goals, the values that were being expressed, are about sufficiency. And this is actually something that I should also mention is at the heart of degrowth, and the community of degrowth and that movement, which is also something that is mentioned in the Doughnut book and then written-off. Degrowth is actually about an alternative community, a different society, about thinking differently and getting rid of the kind of goals that have been at the core of modernity and going back to actually respecting values.

This is where I agree with much of what Kate says in terms of the values and value positions. What I disagree with is her lack of analysis of the basic structure of the economy which is not an 'ism' it's a reality, and also the failure to really get to the heart of what it is. So when she writes things off, like, you know, 'capital *ism*' and then goes immediately on to explain capital-labour relationships, then she's creating a conceptualisation of what the real economy is about. You can't get away from it, you do it implicitly. So you just create another black box with metaphors of doughnuts. It doesn't help us.

What you have to do is look at the basic structure. Understand it. What are the mechanisms going on. When we look at the things, you know, why would democracy help us, why would citizens' juries help us? Because they have to actually engage with power and power relationships. Why do the Sami lose out? Why are the Sami getting wiped out and have been for 150 to 200 years? Because of power and power relationships. Because people want their resources, people wanted their land, people took it over. So the problem with the SDGs is that it empowers industrialisation, it empowers corporations, it empowers strong governments and people to go ahead with exactly what they've been doing ever since the rise of modernity over the last 400 years, which is to take over, grab resources and treat the people as they want, to get their own way.

[My comments were followed by Aili Keskitalo, President of the Sami Parliament who agreed with my remarks on SDGs.]