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ARTICLE

The Practical Politics of Doughnut Economics and Climate Crisis

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An attractive way to address both the climate crisis and the problem of global inequality is to tax rich countries, individuals and businesses, who are responsible for the greater part of carbon emissions, and redistribute the proceeds to create carbon-neutral infrastructure and address human needs through state action (see Raworth 2017 *Doughnut Economics: Seven Ways to Think Like a 21st-Century Economist*, Penguin Random House; Gough 2017 *Heat, Need and Human Greed*, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.). However the dominant value framework in which ideas about wealth, need, and redistribution are embedded centres on deservingness. This largely justifies existing poverty and wealth-holdings, making redistribution within and beyond the rich countries of the global North hard to achieve. Two developments – the ‘deliberative wave’ of citizen participation in government, and the impact of crises in nurturing prosocial values – point to a rapid and sustained value shift. This paper reviews and analyses evidence to consider the practical politics of oughnut economics.

Keywords: Doughnut economics; climate change; human need; attitudes to inequality; deservingness

Introduction

Climate change is arguably ‘the defining issue of our time’ (UN, 2021). Current policies focus principally on green growth, but most commentators argue that zero growth offers the only viable future for the planet in the available time-scale (Hickel, 2020). Unfortunately ‘the ideals of sufficiency, material thresholds and economic equality ... are incompatible with the economic norms of the present, where ... the indefinite pursuit of economic growth is necessary for political and economic stability’ (Millward-Hopkins *et al.*, 2020, see Merz *et al.* (2023, 2-3), Gough (2017, 15)).

Raworth (2017) proposes an economics of sustainability where the goal is the creation of a ‘safe and just space for humanity’. This is summed up in the metaphor of the ‘doughnut,’ a sustainable space between external ecological threats and the internal demands of human needs.

This paper argues that the outer and inner pressures on such a living space are defined through different logics and that the policies addressing them acceptable to publics in richer countries are shaped by complicated and intransigent values which do not follow the simpler frameworks of largely normative conceptions of human need (Mandelli, 2022). Centred on deservingness, the established value-system of the rich global North inhibits the redistribution necessary for justice and the progressive taxation necessary to finance the measures so urgently needed to contain carbon emissions because many people regard wealth as largely legitimate and poverty as largely deserved.

Work on the ‘deliberative wave’ (OECD, 2020) of new participative democratic institutions, however, shows that citizen engagement generates greater support for rapid changes, while the evidence on responses to disasters from the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami to the 2007–2008 financial crisis to the 2008 Sichuan earthquake to the 2019–2023 Coronavirus pandemic indicates that crises produce greater solidarity in very different social contexts. In the current context, the impact of climate change may create the conditions necessary for effective and progressive policies with sufficient urgency to address the issue.

The paper falls into seven sections, which review Raworth’s framework, consider its policy implications, present evidence on public attitudes to wealth, need, and redistribution, consider the role of popular ideas of deservingness in explaining such attitudes, review material on the values surrounding ecosocial policy, discuss them in relation to the impact of both the move to greater citizen participation in democracies and of disasters, themselves growing more frequent due to the overarching climate crisis, and conclude. Urgent change is necessary and is constrained by the values prevalent in rich countries but may be facilitated by value shifts now underway.

Defining the doughnut

In Raworth’s work, ecological hazards are operationalised in terms of the nine interlinked threats identified by Rockström and Steffen (2009): ozone layer depletion, air pollution, biodiversity loss, land conversion, freshwater withdrawal, nitrogen/phosphorus loading, chemical pollution, ocean acidification, and climate change, which now plays the central role and is the concern of this paper. Human rights at the basic level understood as human needs define the minimum level of resourcing for survival. ‘Together, the social foundation of human rights and the ecological ceiling of planetary boundaries create the inner and outer boundaries of the Doughnut’ (Raworth, 2017, 49; see also Fuchs *et al.*, 2021).

The logics of the ceiling to the just and safe space, defined by external threats and the floor defined by human need, differ. The ceiling is delimited through a scientific/rational process which in relation to climate change currently estimates the maximum sustainable level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere at 350 parts per million parts by 2050. This is the level established by the International Panel on Climate Change (2023) as most likely to reduce atmospheric concentrations (currently some 419 ppm, Climate Change Tracker, 2024) over time to the level at which carbon emissions can be managed. Since the gas takes between 200 and 500 years to degrade in air and will accumulate, emissions must be roughly halved from the current level by 2030 to allow the quantity of carbon in the atmosphere to diminish and meet the target.

Apart from a science-based approach to physiological need (for example Rowntree, 1901; Maslow, 1954), debates about human need are largely conducted in social and normative terms (see Lamb and Steinberger, 2017). Human needs exceed the level of mere physical survival because humans are social animals and their needs include all the facilities, accomplishments and opportunities necessary to live as a member of society – including a legitimate political system, language and communication, security and education (Plant *et al.*, 1980).

Doyal and Gough (1991) take the discussion forward and importantly bridge between normative needs and more concrete social institutions through the distinction between needs and satisfiers – the particular institutions and technologies used in different societies to meet the same overall need (see Gough, 2017 42–3 for further detail and Rao and Min, 2017 for a similar approach). For example food may be provided through self-provisioning agriculture or a market-based commercial framework, transport via free buses or private cars, education through universal access to resources or a face-to-face teacher. This approach predominates in social policy (Lister, 2024; Dean, 2020). Needs as satisfied in different places at socially accepted levels constitute the floor of the doughnut.

This has implications for sustainability. While some live at or below a basic need boundary, however defined (see Fanning *et al.*, 2022), many live above it, some very far above it.

While inequality between nations is falling, inequality within nations is growing (Piketty, 2020; Qureshi, 2023). Wealth has become more concentrated, wealthy groups and individuals have grown more powerful, and the activities of the wealthy who directly control an ever greater proportion of total production and consumption are responsible for the lion's share of carbon emissions. The top 10 per cent are responsible for about half of all emissions while the bottom 50 per cent are responsible for less than one eighth (World Inequality Database, 2024; Oswald *et al.*, 2020; Wiedmann *et al.*, 2020).

Top-end emissions and the safe and just space

The pathbreaking empirical work of O'Neill and colleagues illustrates the scale of the challenge. In a snapshot based on 2015 data (O'Neill *et al.*, 2018) they present a detailed account of both biophysical and social indicators for over 150 nations measuring both the extent to which basic needs are met and the associated resource consumption and carbon emissions which define the safe and just space. They find 'physical needs such as nutrition, sanitation, access to electricity and the elimination of extreme poverty could likely be met for all people without transgressing planetary boundaries. However, the universal achievement of more qualitative goals (for example, high life satisfaction) would require a level of resource use that is two to six times the sustainable level, based on current relationships' (op cit 88-9). In addition there is a close positive relation between achieving the lower social boundary of satisfying human needs for all and crossing the upper boundary of unsustainable carbon emissions (op cit Fig. 2). Fanning *et al.* (2022) provide a further analysis over the period from 1992 to 2015 which reinforces the argument. Where the floor is achieved it is at the expense of the ceiling.

The fact that emissions by rich people and rich countries and associated with the businesses, which they promote and on which they depend, are so much higher than those by the poor suggests that redistributive policies on a national and global basis could do much to achieve a living space that is both safe and just. However this may not be the case.

Millward-Hopkins and Oswald (2021, 59) analyse data from the International Social Survey Project (ISSP) for thirty-two countries in the global North which cover responses to questions about the perceived pay of different occupations from the chief executive officer of a top-500 company to a routine manual worker. The survey goes on to ask what people think are fair rewards. The findings show that people on average underestimate inequalities and that existing inequalities are greatly beyond what people regard as fair (op cit Fig 1). Using material on the average carbon footprints of different income and hence consumption levels of various groups they then argue that (op cit Fig 4.2): 'all else being equal, reducing inequalities is not a means to mitigate carbon emissions' because redistributing income in general redistributes rather than abolishes associated carbon emissions.

Recomposing consumption – by reducing inequalities in household expenditure and the overall levels, then reallocating the reductions to public services – reduces carbon footprints by up to 30 per cent in individual countries and 16 per cent overall and, crucially, still allows the consumption of those at the bottom to rise' (op cit 1). The sums involved are considerable: some nine point six trillion dollars or some ten times Official Development Aid (OECD, 2024) would be necessary to promote sustainability across the globe.

Similarly Chancel *et al.* (2023) estimate that additional taxes on polluting first-world-centred business activities such as aviation and shipping 'would generate between US\$132 and \$392 billion annually to support Small Island Developing States' and Least Developed Countries' responses to climate change-induced losses, damages, and adaptation' (2023 101). This approach would clearly help the poorest indirectly by promoting a liveable climate.

These points suggest that the twin components of the safe and just space need to be addressed separately. While safety and sustainability are to do with taxation directed principally at

containing and limiting the damage from carbon-emitting activities, justice is concerned with redistribution to the poorest. Governments are the only agencies with the authority to introduce such policies within the relevant time-frame (Lieven, 2020). This depends among other things on the support of (mainly) rich-world citizens for redistribution both to help the poor and to move towards a sustainable economy.

To consider how far this is viable, we need to move beyond the scientific/rational arguments presented in the Global Stocktake to consider the social values associated with need, poverty, riches, inequality, and redistribution in the global North, examine how perceptions of climate change influence the debate and identify possible ways forward.

Social attitudes to need, riches and inequality

This section considers the substantial body of work, both quantitative and qualitative, on attitudes to poverty and inequality and the smaller body on attitudes to riches and the rich. The quantitative work is mostly based on reanalysis of large-scale surveys. The qualitative work consists of focus-group studies of specific policy themes or directions and, more recently, mini-publics, various termed citizens' juries or deliberative forums.

This work shows that most people confidently identify poor groups but in general do not support large scale redistribution to meet need. Instead they tend to make strong distinctions between groups such as pensioners and disabled people whom they see as deserving of help and other groups such as unemployed people whom they see as far less deserving (Baumberg, 2016; Laenen and Roosma, 2022).

Similarly most people concur on the 'riches line' in their society, above which people do not need more in order to enjoy a full life and many regard the level of inequality as unfair, but few support government intervention or large-scale redistribution. Hadler (2005) and Larsen (2016) analyse ISSP data across some forty countries in the global North in a similar way to Millward-Hopkins and Oswald (2021) to confirm that most people underestimate income inequalities and still believe they are unfairly large but, on average, do not support state redistribution to address the inequalities that they do recognise. In any case Bechert and Osberg (2023, Table 4) point out that, while on average ISSP respondents view inequalities as excessive, this does not reflect a broad social perspective, but rests on strong views about the unfairness of observed inequalities held by small groups in the samples from each country.

A common finding concerns 'relative deprivation' (Runciman, 1966). Throughout the income distribution people tend to compare their circumstances with those of the groups close to them. As a result, perceptions of inequality are narrowed and aspirations limited (see Dean and Melrose 1999).

A recent OECD review of thirty-six survey-experiments on attitudes to inequality showed that inequality is underestimated but that the provision of accurate information had only a small effect on respondents' enthusiasm for redistribution (OECD, 2021). Prabhakar *et al.* (2017, 350) show that on average UK respondents underestimate the wealth gap by about half, think it is unfair but do not support state redistribution by a large majority (compare Taylor-Gooby, 2005). An innovative vignette study in the Netherlands shows that a broad population sample arrive at a consensus on the level of income above which a 'family has more than they need to lead a good life' but 'object to the government's enforcement of limits to wealth and income' (Robeyns *et al.*, 2021 143–45). A focus group study in the UK using a methodology analogous to that used for the Minimum Income Standard (Bradshaw *et al.*, 2008) produces similar findings (Davis *et al.*, 2020, 48).

These findings indicate that a doughnut expressing popular conceptions of fairness could be constructed with the lower bound defined by a currently acceptable modest income level and the upper bound by currently acceptable levels of wealth. It would have a vertiginously bumpy floor,

since the needs of different disadvantaged groups are valued differently. To the extent that the ceiling is determined by the levels of riches that the survey respondents find tolerable, it would be dizzyingly vaulted to reflect the reluctance to redistribute current highly unequal wealth above a perceived riches line. This raises the question of how these views are to be explained beyond the simple underestimation of inequality, since people still show no enthusiasm for redistributive interventions even when the scale of existing inequalities is made clear to them.

The role of ideas about deservingness

While studies of attitudes to and of the rich are fewer than those to and of the poor, deservingness is a strong theme in both, nuanced by national values and institutions but still of over-riding importance. The overall framework of deservingness as a legitimating factor discriminating between those meriting more or less support and correspondingly for wealth helps explain a lack of enthusiasm for redistribution even among those who identify high levels of poverty, need, and conversely wealth in their societies. The situation is complicated because most people do not understand the scale of inequality and in any case see success as largely deserved, views which are shared by the rich themselves.

This matters because top-end consumption has a disproportionate effect on climate change and because the influence of the rich on policy outcomes and their capacity to obstruct and delay policies designed to limit emissions at the top-end or to redistribute is disproportionately large. Elsässer and Schäfer (2023, 469) show that ‘as the social distance between rulers and ruled increases, representative democracy gets more biased in favour of higher-status social groups’. Hacker and Pierson (2010) point to the ‘major policy shifts that have bolstered the economic standing of those at the top’ and then link those shifts to ‘concrete organizational efforts by resourceful private interests’ (2010, 152, see also Pierson and Sundell, 2023, 9).

Van Oorshott identifies five dimensions of deservingness in an extended and influential literature review (2000, 36, see also Cook, 1979; Coughlin, 1980; Dean and Taylor-Gooby, 1992). Need as others perceive it is one of these, but making a contribution to society, taking responsibility for one’s circumstances and striving to improve them, gratitude for help and closeness, particularly through family membership, ethnicity, or nationality play equally important roles. This moralistic ‘work-ethic’ approach reflects social values and policies and is particularly strong in the more liberal Anglo-Saxon countries compared with the European democracies (see Taylor-Gooby *et al.*, 2019 119).

Perceptions of deservingness also play a prominent role in shaping attitudes to the rich. Mijs (2019) analyses twenty-five years of ISSP data shows that ‘rising inequality is legitimated by the popular belief that the income gap is meritocratically deserved’. In general people in the North believe that the wealthy and those who receive high incomes are more deserving of their outcomes than the poor are deserving of social benefits (see Rowlingson and Connor, 2011 for the UK, Skilling and McLay 2017 for New Zealand, Hansen 2003 for the US and Denmark, Horwitz and Dovidio, 2017 and Parker, 2012 for the US and Zitellmann, 2021 for seven countries in the global North). Studies of the rich themselves indicate that they tend to share these views (Suhay *et al.*, 2021; Hecht, 2017; Sherman, 2017; Knowles, 2023).

Popular explanations of the deservingness of the rich in many ways reflect those of attitudes to the deservingness of the poor (see Table 1), although notions of excess wealth are typically not identified as reasons to restrict or redistribute resources. The effort made by the individual is of most importance in deservingness of wealth, mentioned in all the studies, and reflected in the stereotype of the self-made millionaire. Contribution to society, by job-creation and less commonly by improving the environment are also important, and in a few studies through paying taxes. Charity, helping others, is seen as equivalent to gratitude on the part of the recipient of benefits. Closeness through family, ethnicity, or nationality also plays a part.

Table 1. Factors contributing to deservingness

Need		Effort/Merit	Contribution	Gratitude	Closeness
Benefits	Destitution	Striving to escape poverty	Willingness to work	For what is provided	By family, ethnicity, nation
Wealth	Excess wealth	Self-made	Providing jobs and goods	Charity to others	By family, ethnicity, nation

It is striking that the most commonly and emphatically mentioned values in relation to both poverty and wealth are expressed in individual terms. Partly this may be a failure to identify the degree of inequality across society, partly the view that the rich are ‘industrious, able and intelligent’ as people (Zitellmann, 2021, see Hecht, 2017; Sherman, 2017; Knowles, 2023; Walker *et al.*, 2021) and that it is these personal characteristics that explain and justify their position. Interestingly, the wider the rich-poor gap, the more inequality is seen as merited, on the grounds that the steeper the slope, the more mobility up it indicates talent, hard work and entrepreneurship (Heiserman and Simpson, 2017; Sanchez-Rodriguez *et al.*, 2019).

A number of studies show that high-achieving people typically attribute their success to their own effort rather than any advantage of background. Friedman and Laurison (2020) interviewed 175 elite professional Londoners, 90 per cent from highly privileged backgrounds, to find only four who were aware that privileged education, support through internships and contacts had contributed to their success (see Suhay *et al.*, 2021; Friedman *et al.*, 2023; Reeves and Frieman, 2024). Social psychology experiments by Koo *et al.* (2023) show a strong positive correlation between confidence that wealth is generated by one’s own efforts and diminished support for redistribution to others.

These points reinforce the difficulties in moving towards a fairer living space based on a floor of human need, to be achieved by redistributing from the wealthy to raise the living standards of the poorest. This raises the question of whether attitudes to climate change or growing awareness of the urgency of the problem can make a difference.

Climate change and attitudes to state policy

There are indications that mass publics take climate change increasingly seriously and want governments to act. Mass mobilisations (Murphy, 2023, ch 7) enhance the pressure on governments to move faster and this is reflected in attitude studies. Responses to questions in repeated rounds of ISSP show rising disquiet about climate change, especially in the global North, and growing endorsement of government action. This shift is especially marked among more highly educated people and in richer countries and correlates with action by government (Axel and Meyer, 2004; Tjernström and Tietenberg, 2008). Analysis of the Pew Research Centre’s forty country Global Attitudes Survey for 2015 and ISSP and ESS data by Arıkan and Günay (2021, see also Kvaløy *et al.*, 2012), and of a comparative survey of China, Germany, and the US (Ziegler, 2017) points to similar findings. The surveys also show that support for government action is stronger among groups and in countries where general levels of trust in government are higher (Fairbrother *et al.*, 2019; Cologna and Siegrist, 2020).

Further qualitative work on citizen attitudes and policy uses democratic forums, citizen assemblies, or mini-publics. These are broadly representative bodies drawn from the general public who meet together, typically several times, to debate an issue, often drawing on experts for advice on specific issues (see Fishkin, 2009; Burchardt, 2012; OECD, 2020). Advocates argue that this process enables researchers to examine attitude change through discussion and provides better understanding of the policy choices an informed public would make, the strength of their

views, their commitment to policy change and the arguments that sway opinions than do interview surveys.

Studies of the outcomes of debates in large multi-meeting Citizens' Assemblies in ten European countries by the end of 2022 (Lage *et al.*, 2023; Ainscough and Willis, 2024) show that mass publics are more radical in their commitment to major policy shifts on this issue, in particular being much more likely to promote policies that aim for substantial changes in behaviour to reduce demand for energy such as a wholesale shift to public transport or reduced home heating levels, rather than incremental improvements to the efficiency of generation. This contrasts with the policies of their governments, which tend to be more concerned with subsidising new technologies or other economic interventions which prioritise continued growth, are favoured by existing producers and demand less behavioural change.

Further analysis of the failure to achieve the Paris targets by Willis *et al.* (2022), centred on the French, UK, and Irish Citizens Assemblies, concludes 'that deliberation-based reforms to democratic systems, including ... deliberative mini-publics, are a necessary and potentially transformative ingredient in climate action'. Again the argument is that the assemblies tend to be more radical in their proposals than are national governments in their policy-making and are helpful in overcoming the 'democratic deficit' of countries which agree to targets but fail to put their aspirations into practice. More broadly, Chan *et al.* (2019) suggest that non-state actors can play an important role in pressing state policy to move forward, but need opportunities, material from experts and education to succeed.

People recognise climate change as a major issue and, especially in higher income countries, desire government action to move towards greater safety and sustainability. However, there is little evidence that these ideas are linked to enthusiasm for redistribution to achieve greater social fairness in meeting human needs and achieve a safe and just society.

A series of studies of the ISSP (Otto and Gugushvili, 2020; Jakobsson *et al.*, 2018, 313), European Social Survey (Fritz and Koch, 2019), World Values Survey (Kvaløy *et al.*, 2012) and other sources (Spies-Butcher and Stebbing, 2016) which examine responses to questions on environmental policies and social programmes find little correlation between the two., Otto and Gugushvili state: 'building a substantial ecological layer upon the existing welfare state will not be an easy task ... less than a quarter of Europeans (23 per cent) were "ecosocial enthusiasts" ... which implies having a positive stance towards public welfare and climate change policies' (2020, 9). These studies indicate that we cannot look to the development of a more sympathetic understanding of climate crises to drive a major ecosocial value shift that will generate the necessary policies within the necessary, urgent time frame.

Discussion

Raworth's doughnut is an important step forward because it takes the debate away from the sterile paradigm that progress is automatically bound up with economic growth and foregrounds the idea of a fair and safe economy that does not depend on continued and unsustainable expansion. However, it yokes together two kinds of issue: the ecological problems resulting from the use of fossil fuel-based technology and addressed through scientific approaches, and the social problem of satisfying human needs resulting from the interaction of people with nature and with each other among the institutions and values that exist in their own societies and in other more powerful countries.

These problems cannot be addressed by the same policies. The first requires a rapid reduction in carbon emissions, new policies to make environments more resilient, and recomposing our means of production and consumption to ensure a continued sustainable rate of emissions. The second requires policies directed at raising the living standards and opportunities of the most deprived groups globally to acceptable levels and establishing the institutions necessary to ensure they remain there.

Both programmes are best financed by the progressive taxation of individuals, polluting businesses and countries, and the use of the proceeds through state policies first to address the ecological challenge and second the human need challenge. The first strategy will contribute to the second, since the poorest bear the brunt of many of the hazards of climate change. It overlaps with but does not substitute for redistribution to the poor, since diminishing the excess consumption and emissions of the disproportionately rich is unlikely to have a major impact overall unless their consumption power is redistributed in such a way that it enables once poor groups to limit their emissions.

This article focuses on the dominant social value system in relation to wealth, inequality and redistribution in the global North. The studies across the North reviewed above indicate that the established value-systems of these countries militate against general progressive taxation to reduce excess wealth and address human needs because wealth, poverty, and inequality are seen as largely deserved and thus legitimate. The limited evidence available indicates that policies to mitigate climate change financed by taxes on the rich are now looked on somewhat more favourably, especially by those who are well-informed on the issues and have had the opportunity to discuss them and think them through. While this is confirmed in both qualitative and quantitative studies, the link between environmental and social programmes appears to be weak with separate groups supporting each. In addition studies of attitudes to ecosocial programmes show these are only endorsed by minorities.

At first sight, these findings suggest that ecosocial approaches are unlikely to gain popular support and be reflected in policy change on the scale required in the global North despite the strong science-based case for prioritising an end to carbon emissions and the normative case for North-South redistribution. However there are two positive indications in the attitude literature.

First, work on citizens' forums shows that participants are both more receptive to scientific evidence and more inclined to embrace radical policy changes than respondents in population surveys reporting ideas structured through general public discourse. Approaches that enable members of the public to debate issues, comment on them, and participate in policy making are becoming more common globally, a development sometimes referred to as the 'deliberative wave' (OECD, 2020; Goldberg and Bächtiger, 2023; UCL, 2024). Dryzek (2010) comments that: 'deliberative democracy now dominates the theory, reform, and study of democracy'. A substantial majority of the 2259 cases recorded in the Participedia directory of 'democratic innovations in participatory governance' have been established since 2000 (Participedia, 2024). The greater valuing of participation is reflected in the inclusion of 'experts by experience' in many areas of social policy and policy-making (for example, CQC, 2023; NHS, 2019, Poverty and Inequality Commission, Scotland, 2024, and SEA 2018).

Secondly, there is good evidence from studies of responses to calamities that these tend to generate strong collective feelings and influence behaviour in prosocial directions (Spade, 2020). This applies to natural disasters (see Fleming *et al.*, 2014; Hutchinson, 2014) and crises that result from human actions (Hawdon and Ryan, 2011). The aftermaths of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, the 2007–2008 great recession and the 2021–2023 Coronavirus epidemic provide further examples. Kim (2024) and Nettle *et al.* (2021) summarise data from studies in Europe and South-East Asia showing how social disruption and mass unemployment in 2020 and 2021 promoted widespread support for welfare reforms, including Universal Basic Income which through its universality cuts directly across the logic of deservingness (Nast, 2020; Ng, 2020 and Pickard (2020). Abrams and Vasiljevic (2014) for the financial crisis and Abrams (2021) in an extensive national study of responses to Coronavirus using quantitative and qualitative data also find a rapid increase in social cohesion, again most strongly where supportive institutions already exist, and again tending to decline over a fairly short period, most sharply where the community framework is weakest. There is however some evidence that direct personal experiences of calamity and of the social response to it in early adulthood strengthen support for collective action throughout life (Krishnarajan *et al.*, 2023).

The significance of the generally prosocial responses to a whole range of crises is that most commentators suggest that, in addition to a continuing process of deterioration in the liveability of the planet, conditions will pass tipping points leading to an ecological step-change (GSI, 2023). At the same time obvious discrete disasters (extreme weather events, failures of water and food supply and transport systems, intolerable heat waves or cold spells, disruption of raw material supply, and so on) will become increasingly more frequent (UNDRR, 2020; WMO, 2023). The outcome can be understood as calamities which will be increasingly difficult to manage. These will tend to generate stronger prosocial responses which in turn are likely to lead to support for exceptional measures. Climate change may itself feed the value shifts necessary to address it.

Conclusion

This paper has assembled data to show that, despite a strong scientific case for pro-environmental policies and a strong moral case for global redistribution to meet human needs, mass values in the most powerful democracies are unlikely to endorse the necessary rational and humane policy shifts. However, the data also supports the view that the turn towards greater citizen involvement in government together with the impact on values of the crises generated by climate change may lead to the rapid and sustained growth of strong prosocial values. Doughnut economics presents a challenge to the growth-oriented, unequal societies of the global North. The second challenge is to achieve the inclusive and prosocial public consciousness that is so urgently necessary to confront the problems we face.

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