HEAT, GREED AND HUMAN NEED
Climate Change, Capitalism and Sustainable Wellbeing

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• What are the social impacts of climate change?
• How is capitalism driving climate change?
• How can we improve and sustain human wellbeing?
Two ways of visualising relationships between environment, society and economy

**The moral economy**
Economy a subsystem of human society, which is a subsystem of the biosphere

**The political economy**
The global economy dominates and shapes society and environment
How can we achieve this ‘safe and just space for humanity’?

Kate Raworth’s ‘Doughnut’
The argument in brief

Social action and public policy

Greed economy

Need society

Heat environment

Social policy

Climate policy

Social action and public policy
Global warming and environmental boundaries
Rising greenhouse gases (GHGs)

CO2 concentrations over 400,000 years

For centuries, atmospheric carbon dioxide had never been above this line.

1950 level

current level

1950
Global warming since 1884
Effects of climate change
Hurricane Maria in Dominica

“Severe, widespread, and irreversible impacts for billions of people and the natural world”
IPCC
Urgent priority
Drastic, unprecedented de-carbonisation of the global economy
The later it is left, the faster it must happen

This does not take account of “tipping points”
Three climate policy agendas

- **Mitigation**, geo-engineering, **adaptation**

- **Reduce net flow of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere**
- **Find technofixes to reverse global warming**
- **Adapt to global warming**
2015 Paris Agreement

• Goal is to hold any increase in global average temperature to well below 2 °C, and aim for 1.5 °C

• All countries to decide their own contribution, reviewed every five years

• At present these commitments amount to only one third of what is required.

‘By comparison to what it could have been, it’s a miracle. By comparison to what it should have been, it’s a disaster’ (Monbiot)
GREED

Capitalism, growth and inequality
The Anthropocene
Capitalist era of man-made greenhouse gas emissions and global warming

Global $\text{CO}_2\text{e}$ emissions per region from 1920 to today
Capitalism

• “Legitimate greed” is the driving force of the economic system

• Pursuit of profit is the defining goal

• Accumulation and economic growth are essential, inbuilt features

• Concentrations of capital create powerful interests that can influence or buy governments
Economic growth and emissions

• Growth is the **key driver** of emissions
• But capitalism also generates relentless **technological change**
• This has improved “**eco-efficiency**” through increased production with lower GHG emissions
• Thus far growing output has **always outpaced** improved eco-efficiency
• But ‘**green growth**’ remains the dominant strategy
Who emits?
Production-based and consumption-based emissions

Percentage change in territorial emissions to reflect impact of consumption of CO2

2004 domestic CO₂ emissions (27Gt)

1 Annex 1 to UNFCC.
UK consumption and production emissions 1990-2010
**Average consumption emissions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>tCO₂e per person per year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>World average</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N. Americans</td>
<td>22.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West. Europeans</td>
<td>13.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino Americans</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S. Asians</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africans</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustainable level</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The “Plutocene”

World’s richest 10% account for 50% of consumption emissions

Percentage of CO₂ emissions by world population

Richest 10%: 49%
19%
11%
7%
4%
3%
2.5%
2%
1.5%
1%

Poorest 50% responsible for only around 10% of total lifestyle consumption emissions

Source: Oxfam

Global income deciles and associated lifestyle consumption emissions
The double – and triple - injustice

• Rich countries are responsible for most past consumption emissions
• Poorer countries suffer more from negative impacts of climate change
• Reducing emissions can harm poorer groups
  – Carbon pricing hits the poor harder
  – Climate policies can widen inequalities
Rising inequality drives emissions

• Inequality within countries drives status competition and excessive consumption
• Linked to longer working hours and more debt
• Hinders collective action to control emissions
  – Inequality erodes trust and solidarity
  – Rich can go private in many areas reducing commitment to public goods and collective action.
Why we must move beyond green growth

Green growth the dominant strategy today

1. The pragmatic case
   – Increasing eco-efficiency, though essential, cannot be enough

2. The moral case
   – Issues of equity and justice are sidelined
   – Consumer preferences and spending power still determine what is produced

So we require an alternative moral standard
HUMAN NEED

The moral economy
Needs and sustainable wellbeing
Needs and sustainable development

“Sustainable development... meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

It contains within it two key concepts:

1. Needs
2. Limitations

*Brundtland Report 1987*
What are human needs?

Three basic human needs:

- **Social participation** (affiliation, relatedness, belonging)
- **Health** (physical and mental wellbeing)
- **Autonomy** (competence, practical reasoning)

If these are not satisfied then serious harm results.
Universal intermediate needs

- Nutrition and water
- Housing and safe environments
- Healthcare and safe birth control
- Security in childhood and significant primary relationships
- Physical and economic security
- Appropriate education.
Impact of climate change on satisfaction of human needs: health

• Direct impacts
  – Extreme heat, fires, floods, infectious diseases, rising sea levels

• Effects of burning fossil fuels
  – 87% of cities globally are in breach of WHO guidelines on air pollution

• Global food security
  – Drought, soil erosion, loss of biodiversity

• Distress migration
  – Loss of livelihoods and rising insecurity

Plus the danger of tipping points and climate breakdown.
Why are human needs central to sustainable wellbeing?

**Because** human needs are

- universal
- objective
- plural and non-substitutable
- satiable and sufficient
- cross-generational
Needs provide a moral metric...

... To move beyond green growth

- Human needs enable us to compare and assess wellbeing across the world and into the future

- They are crucial for understanding social rights and social justice
  - across generations
  - across cultures
  - across class, gender and other differences within countries
SOCIAL ACTION AND PUBLIC POLICY IN THE RICH WORLD

What can be done?
Three stages of transition
The role of eco-social policies
Social policy and human need

“Welfare states” are under attack, but still perform crucial roles in meeting needs:
• Income security, income buffers
• Social services, e.g. NHS
• Social investment, e.g. policies on employment, wages, education and skills

These strengthen security and resilience in face of climate change
They are preventive and precautionary
Climate policy and global warming

• Legal & institutional frameworks
  – UK Climate Change Act 2008
  – Despite attacks this still holds

• Major policy instruments
  – Carbon taxing and pricing
  – Public standards and regulation
  – Green investment

• Existence, patterns and impacts of these policies vary greatly between nations
Joining up social and climate policies

- Social policy **ignores** climate sustainability
- Climate policies can be **inequitable**:
  - Carbon pricing hurts lower income households
  - Current UK policies exacerbate fuel poverty
- So we require **joined-up** policy and practice between social and climate programmes
Three strategies towards a sustainable future

1. Equitable green growth
2. Recompose consumption in rich countries
3. Degrowth/post-growth – reduce total demand in rich countries
Level 1. Equitable green growth

- **Green New Deal** to retrofit the housing stock, starting with the most energy inefficient
- **Invest** in low carbon public transport
- **Social tariffs** for electricity, gas, water
- **Stronger policies to reduce inequality**

This calls for **active state steering** of markets, incompatible with neo-liberal capitalism

“The tragedy of Bad Timing” – Naomi Klein
Level 2. Recompose consumption

• The problem: consumption in the rich world
• Bring human needs and ‘need satisfiers’ centre-stage
• Interrogate consumer preferences and consumer sovereignty
• Distinguish necessities and luxuries
• An essential transformation
Needs challenge wants

Consumer demand

Wants

Incomes

Policies based on needs
Needs versus Wants

“The world has enough for everyone’s need, but not enough for everyone’s greed.”

If the 40 million SUVs in USA were ordinary cars, all 1.6bn people in the world could have electricity without more emissions.
Defining necessities in a finite world

How to distinguish need-satisfiers and luxuries in a democratic society?

• Bring together citizens and experts
• Citizens’ forums that are inclusive and empowering
• “Public engagement through reasoned deliberation”
• This must be a problem-solving process, not a way of aggregating people’s preferences.
Citizens’ forums identify ‘necessities’

This can and is being done:

• **UK Minimum Income Standards (MIS)** research identifies necessities this way

• Groups representing different household types reach consensus on what is required to enable people to participate in British society

• They agree on a bundle of goods and services and a decent minimum income
Result: Decent living with lower carbon UK in 2004: but still too high
Eco-social policies to help recompose consumption (1)

- Promote and invest in co-benefits
  - cycling and walking
  - eating less meat

- Tax high-carbon luxuries
  - smart VAT
  - remove incentives for frequent flyers

- Control advertising and product placement

- Trial carbon rationing
  - introduce carbon cards?
Eco-social policies to help recompose consumption (2)

• Expand and strengthen social provision
  – “Universal Basic Services” to include water, energy, transport, housing
  – Public provision improves equity and sustainability

• Decarbonise welfare states
  – shrink carbon footprint of public services
  – develop upstream prevention throughout public policy
Level 3. Degrowth

• Grasp the nettle of endless growth
• Degrowth: ‘An equitable downscaling of economic throughput’
• Can we envision a transitional strategy to such a radical future?
• A starting point: reduce paid work time
  – Share work and reduce consumption
  – Move away from 40 hours to release time to live more sustainably
All this demands a new social settlement

- The post-war settlement introduced redistributive welfare states
- Now ecological boundaries require a new sustainable social settlement
- Sustainability goals must be a central feature
  - a new eco-welfare state
  - a new focus on recomposing consumption
  - new policies on time, goods and carbon
IN CONCLUSION
Four imperatives

1. We must stay within the “lifebelt” by meeting needs within environmental boundaries
2. “Greening” capitalism is essential, but not enough and fails to address equity or needs
3. It is vital to change consumption patterns in the rich world, so that needs trump greed
4. And then we must find alternatives to growth.
Thank you