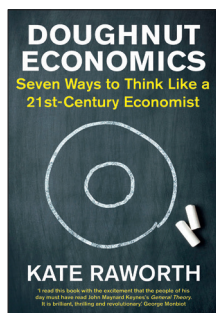


# Life & Times Books

## Doughnut Economics: Seven Ways to Think Like a 21st-Century Economist Kate Raworth

Penguin, 2018, PB, 384pp, £10.99, 978-1847941398



### WHY IT'S SO HARD TO BE A GOOD GLOBAL CITIZEN IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Kate Raworth's *Doughnut Economics* is concerned with the question at the heart of economics: not only what to do about scarcity, but also with an equally profound basis for economics (attributed to the ancient Greek writer Xenophon no less!) — how to budget for a household. The household here is all of human society within the finite limits of planet earth. Raworth conceives of the problem as a doughnut (the American kind with a hole in the middle). The inner ring represents the needs of humanity. The outer ring represents the limits of human interference that the planet can sustain without damage. How might we ensure that, in a world of limited resources, every person has enough (the inner ring)? An economy existing outside of this 'social foundation' ring for all its people would signal that those goods are properly distributed and that the economy meets basic human needs of the individuals who live in it. However, Raworth's model is concerned beyond the human needs hence the ring aimed at addressing planetary needs. This ecological ceiling signifies the rates of consumption that our planet can support. Staying within the outer ring is sustainable for the planet overall. An economy must exist in the area in-between the two rings if humanity is to flourish: fulfilling human needs while still satisfying the planetary needs. It is a delicate balance; we cannot meet our basic human rights without stress on the planet, but overconsumption results in unnecessary stress on the environment. Raworth aims

for a dramatic reframing of economics, throwing out the neoliberal (free markets take care of themselves) thinking that historically dominates the discipline. For Raworth, the tools of economics are not only flawed (the models are influenced by physics and engineering rather than biological systems), but also ill suited in addressing the issues of climate change and distribution. Measures for economic success are often centred around growth, whether it be gross domestic product (GDP) or price measures such as the consumer price index (CPI). Raworth deems both unfit. Instead, she opts to base economics in the state of human and planetary wellbeing, arguing for measures of balance rather than growth.

### REWRITING ECONOMICS

We find it impossible to overstate how important this last element of Raworth's work is. The rewriting of economics from a picture of success defined by growth to one shaped by balance within a fragile ecosystem requires adoption of a mindset that is alien to classical economics. It may not be quite so alien to the 21st-century reader, whether they be a student of social policy or a family doctor. In the past century, we have asked a great deal of economics. In particular, we ignore health inequalities, environmental pollution, and gender equality. Despite the active role these aspects play in our economy, popular indicators of economic success do nothing to effectively measure their importance in our lives. If we cannot properly visualise the problem, we have no effective way of solving it. Solutions such as carbon taxing and the subsidisation of green energy have gained some traction in the lessening of the impacts of climate change.

Yet these policies are aimed at quantifying our environment within a practical value system so that it might fit within the existing economic system. This and simple welfare policies are nothing without the behavioural

shift required to decide that; yes, our environment is worth something; yes, affordable care for all is worth something; or yes, the work of homemakers and others whose value to society GDP fails to capture is worth something.

Raworth argues that growth should not be the ultimate goal for a thriving economy. The shift in mindset that she advocates revolutionises how we think about economic success. The very idea that it might be possible to expand our rate of consumption indefinitely without consideration for the limits of resources or the effect on others' wellbeing and the environment (economists call such factors externalities when they do not feature in transactional costs) is a simple matter of hubris — an act of arrogance that precedes disaster. Anyone can understand the reality behind the limits of consumption, so why do we continue to define success by this myth? Balance between the wellbeing of individuals and the planet is a much better indicator of how the economy is doing.

### HOW DO YOU ACHIEVE A HEALTHY ECONOMY?

Raworth's quite revolutionary model (no pun intended) can come across as simplistic. By contrast, she urges economists, policymakers, and citizens alike to think of the world in a more complex manner. For instance, the poorest people of every economy clearly exist on the inside of the social foundation ring. They are also harmed by activities that go outside of the environmental ceiling. For example, individuals on a low income around the world live in environments affected by pollution and other environmental damage resulting from the demand for consumer goods by the wealthy. Somehow it is also hard to compute that even in affluent societies there is inequality such that individuals are outside the doughnut. Is this a problem with the model or with society? Trying to think on a global and a local scale with consideration of human

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needs and desires, as well as the effects of meeting these while offering alternative goals for economies, is itself disorientating and difficult. Raworth's new ideas in economics 'dance on the page together' but we are left thinking that 'Doughnut Economics: the well-choreographed musical' is a life's work.

Raworth hits on the largest issues in the way of achieving a healthy economy, readily invalidating the pedestal on which we have placed the one-dimensional measurement of GDP. This is mirrored on a smaller scale by the way many small businesses aspire to become big businesses. Raworth is a testament for the need to progress our economic thinking. Time has changed and we need new tools if we are to think like 21st-century economists and behave as 21st-century citizens.

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This review was first posted on *BJGP Life* on 21 March 2022; <https://bjgplife.com/doughnut>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3399/bjgp22X720401>

### Our Mothers Ourselves: Six Women From Across the World Tell Their Mothers' Stories

Cathy Hull, Veena Siddharth, Vayu Naidu, Caryn Solomon, and Rupal Shah

Austin Macauley, 2022, PB, 198pp, £8.99, 978-1398449848



### PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL MIGRATIONS

I was invited to review this book and it seemed quite different from my usual genre of child psychology at first, but I found it to be both thought provoking and heart warming.

*"All the mothers in the book are in some ways 'ordinary' for their time and place of birth, but their stories are extraordinary when brought to life by their daughters."*

Six authors of differing careers, backgrounds, and geography write about their mothers' lives in six chapters, connected by themes of mothering, migration, and cultural change. Profits from the book are being donated to [www.refugeewomen.co.uk](http://www.refugeewomen.co.uk), a charity supporting and empowering women who are refugees and asylum seekers. This book is timely as many of us welcome Ukrainian immigrants into our communities.

All the mothers in the book are in some ways 'ordinary' for their time and place of birth, but their stories are extraordinary when brought to life by their daughters. As such, all of the women transcend the constraints of their different backgrounds. And it *is* extraordinary to read about the past through cultures different from my own. The book is almost dream-like, in the way that memories are fragments of significant moments mixed with ordinary day-to-day moments on different timescales. Each author has a unique style but the common themes and similar timings spanning the Second World War bind them together. It was wonderful to see women's real history documented as so often it is only men and the male perspective that have been documented.

### THE NEXT GENERATION

I learnt some new perspectives on racism with a short history of antisemitism in the UK, apartheid in 1970s South Africa, and the overt and subtle racism of 1970s London for a newly arrived couple from India. In Rupal Shah's mother's story, it really stood out for me that she could tell when someone was patronising or underestimating her because of her appearance and accent.

How 'alien' or 'other' people must feel when moving to a new culture, while also losing touch with their own culture and a feeling of belonging there as well. It led me to question if I was ever guilty of subconsciously patronising people under the pressure of a 10-minute consultation in a culturally diverse area. Provoking insight is the first step to changing biases, so I was grateful for this personal and emotive insight.

The old patriarchal values of women serving men and family were prominent in all the stories. There was some inevitable disconnect at times between the mothers in the book and the next generation writing about them because of these old values. All overcame this disconnection as they were emotionally close to their mothers, but I found it made me question my expectations of my own children.

Our children are learning to live in a different world from their parents. I felt stifled by patriarchal values as a child, but these mothers' stories made me realise how incredibly privileged I have been and how much I want even more social change for my own daughter (and indeed my son). My children may choose a different future from the one I am used to and imagine for them, but these stories show that, while that may be difficult or worrying at times, it is important to support them.

This book gave me feelings of nostalgia, joy, and sadness as well as the comfort of safety and security that only (a good) family can provide. It helped me understand the perspectives of people from cultures other than my own. So maybe it was still my usual genre of child psychology after all!

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This review was first posted on *BJGP Life* on 3 July 2022; <https://bjgplife.com/mothers>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3399/bjgp22X720389>