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Why less is more. Reflections on Prosperity and Wellbeing

**Buddhist Values and Economics: Investing in a
Sustainable Future**

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Agenda

- The Problem
 - One-sided economic growth and consumerism based upon a destructive materialistic dream.
- The Need for a New Metaphysics
 - From 'Know-How' to 'Know-Why'
- Redefinition of the Notion of Prosperity
- What do we know?
 - The search in different world-views
- Lessons from Deep Ecology, 'positive' psychology and virtue ethics
- Payutto's Spiritual Approach to Economics
- Zen Buddhism in Business – Patagonia

**Realizing the potential by using one's abilities.
(megaceros euryceros)'On the tragic' (Zappfe 1996)**



One-sided Growth along only One Dimension



- The huge antlers as means for the deer's survival.
- The evolution and survival of the «fittest» until the antlers became a weakness.
- The extinction of deer because of a surplus of abilities along only one dimension.

How to fulfill our dreams and hope?





Consumer Goods Provide a Bridge to our Highest Ideals.

- Modern marketing **cultivates Desire**.
- The **attachment to material things** as part of the 'extended self'
- **Stuff is not just stuff.**
- Material artefacts may:
 - establish our social position.
 - express our identities.
 - allow us to explore our dreams and hopes.
- **Novel things** as a source of variety and excitement, and a way to escape a **harsh** reality and the restless desire driven by anxiety.



The Need for a new metaphysics: From 'Know-How' to 'Know-Why'

- Metaphysics is **not a luxury**.
- The problem of the metaphysics
 - Western Scientific/Technological mechanistic worldview
 - The main ideas - the survival of the fittest, natural selection, and competition.
 - The man's strongest motivation - economic greed to increase material wealth.
- The existential: ***Who am I? From where do I come, and where am I going?***, as well as the social, and the systemic dimension are ignored.
- No "higher or lower order": a man and a stone as an "accidental collocation of atoms".
- **How to discipline the "Fruits" of the enormous success of constructing material means?**



The Need for a new metaphysics: From 'Know-How' to 'Know-Why'

- **Ethics** as an important part of new metaphysics.
- The need for a life-serving ethics making explicit what human nature is.
- Beyond the world of facts and 'positive science'.
- European humanity is "infused" by a **will to progress which is superficial and on the wrong track.**
- The efficiency and material gains in our culture hinder serious reflection and spirituality. (A. Schweitzer).
- The ethical norm:
Reverence for Life. **Good consists in maintaining, promoting and enhancing life, while evil is all that destroys, injures and suppresses life.**

The redefinition of prosperity (Jackson 2017)

- The need of **New Vision of Prosperity**

From the perverse focus on economic growth and insatiable needs

*to **buen vivir*** - the good life based on the communion of humans and nature.

- Prosperity: Etymology (old Latin)

Prosperus: Pro-spere. 'According to one's hope'.

Pro(for)-sper(hope)-us: "Doing well"

- *From* production (GDP) *to* wellbeing.
- *From* individual material consumption *to* community.
- *From* social wellbeing *to* ecological wellbeing.

Why Less is more. Materialistic vs intrinsic values.

Intrinsic goals versus extrinsic goals.

- **Materialistic** values: popularity, image, financial success, and acquisitions **undermines wellbeing**.
- **Intrinsic** values: 'self-acceptance, affiliation, a sense of belonging' are **our deepest source of wellbeing** (Kasser, Dittmar).
- People with higher intrinsic values are:
 - Happier
 - Have higher levels of environmental responsibility
 - Embed the intrinsic goals in family and community.

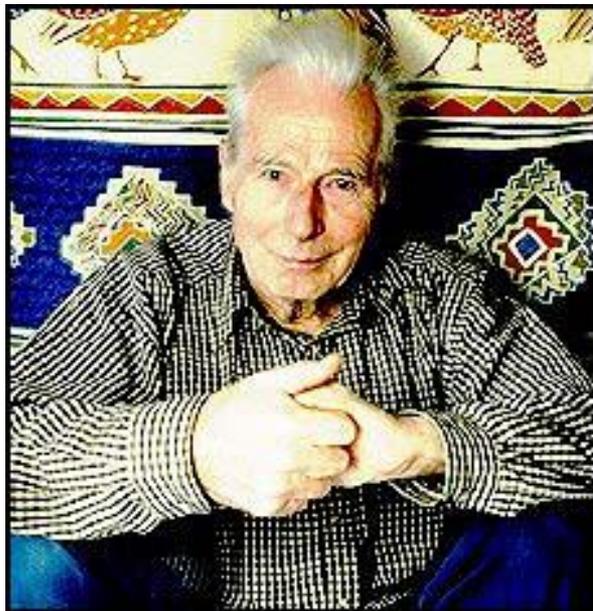
Lessons from wisdom traditions – Why Less is more. Frugality as a Rational *art de vivre*

- ‘Frugalis’ (etymology Latin): Useful in a worthy way
- Individual level: Frugality as **rational strategy**:
 - Low material consumption and simple lifestyle.
 - Opens the mind for spiritual goods.
 - Practiced as the ethics of sustainable enjoyment, and built on a rational calculus of assessment of pains and pleasures. The highest form of pleasure is *ataraxia* – ‘a state in which the soul is as the sea when the wind has calmed.’ (Luk Bouckaert 2008)
- Macro level: **Frugality First!**
 - Frugality should **precede efficiency** in the field of Economics
 - Sustainability should be understood in terms of physical ‘**throughput**’. The task is to limit the scale of the economy. (Herman. E. Daly 2002/2008)

Lessons from wisdom traditions – Why Less is more. Frugality as Spiritual *art de vivre*

- Frugality as a **Spiritual approach** - the quest for God or 'Ultimate Reality' as a release from egocentrism. (Bouckaert 2008)
 - To attain a '**joyful self-detachment** and other-centeredness.'
 - To release the human mind from the active-self-seeking ego, and look inwards to listening to '**The invisible Other**' who is nowhere and everywhere present, and be guided by your spiritual or receptive self. (Bouckaert 2008)

- Arne Næss (1912-2009) framed his own personal view «Ecosophy T»:
- Self-Realization for all beings
 - Live a rich life with simple means.



Why Less is more. Deep Ecological thinking Flourishing within Limits

- Simplicity of means and richness of ends. (Deep Ecological Thinking).
- ‘Simplifiers’ appear to be happier. (Positive Psychology)
- “More fun with less Stuff”.
- Consuming less –voluntarily, can improve subjective wellbeing. (Jackson 2017)

Payutto: Buddhist Approach to Economics



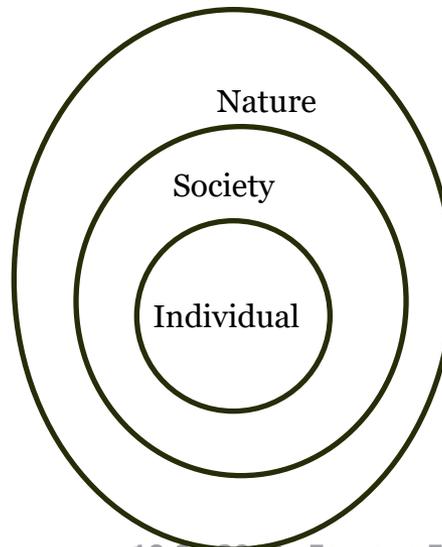
- Emotional factors (fear and desire) are more powerful than reason – drive us to our worst economic excesses – greed, overconsumption, and materialism – ‘damaging our societies and ravaging our environment’.
- The science of economics adopts a rational approach, but the basic question of fear and emotional needs for security are basic. The theoretical models remain rational solutions to irrational problems.

Modern Economics vs Right Livelihood

- Modern economics:
 - Lacks holistic insights
 - Has a narrow view focusing on isolated fragments.
 - Stops when the things on the market is purchased and consumed.
- **Right livelihood** is only one amongst a number of eight factors capable of solving the problems in life. Action and reaction are intertwined and form processes of causes and conditions that we perceive as reality.
- There are two levels of truth //Dhamma//
 1. ethical truth related to matters of good and evil
 2. nature of reality itself which is beyond concerns of good and evil. Buddhist economics strives to direct economic activities in harmony with 1) **and** 2), “the way things are.”

The Holistic view in Buddhist Economics: But what happens AFTER the demand is satisfied?

- How do economic activities **affect the three** interconnected spheres of human existence?
- Ethics forms a bridge between internal and external realities. Ethics act as “subjective causes for objective conditions”.
- **Good actions lead to good results, and the means condition the end.**



The unlimited nature of human wants. Tanha vs chanda

- The wants of humanity are endless.
- Human beings are born in a state of ignorance, which is a limitation in life, and it is a burden called //dukkha// or suffering.
- The blind craving is called //tanha// for sense objects which provide pleasant feelings, (wanting to obtain).
- When ignorance is replaced with wisdom, desires for true wellbeing is called // dhammachanda// or in short, chanda.
- Chanda leads to action and tanha leads to seeking. Tanha is directed toward feeling and leads to seeking objects of self-interest and is supported by ignorance. Chanda is directed towards benefit, leads to action and is based on intelligent reflection.
- The beneficial life is realized when the individual, society and nature serve each other in harmony/balance.



Caring Leadership illustrated by Patagonia Private company owned by Yvon Chouinard





Patagonia's Philosophy of business: When we do the right things, profit follows

- Patagonia is rated as one of the hundred best companies in US **to work for**.
- Has donated more than 22 million dollar since 1985, including the support of the health of the oceans.
- Chouinard states, **business world is "the perfect place I found to apply Zen Philosophy..."**. Compassion and mindfulness can make our businesses a pleasure for ourselves and a gift for our employees and for the world (Hanh, 2007, p 201).



Philosophy of business: Why are we in business? What are our values?

- Quality: to make the very best climbing equipment in the world. To make “really functional, hard-wearing, yet good-looking clothing”, easy to care for and clean, authentic, art, timely, causing any unnecessary harm
- “Flex time”. The company policy states: “You go surfing when the surf comes up”
- Blur the distinction between work, play and family. Started a child-care center (one of the first on-site corporate child-care centers in America). Eighty per cent of the employees were women.



Philosophy of business: Why are we in business? What are our values?

- Hire friends. "Instead of hiring people who studied business in school, we'd much rather hire passionate people who'd be interesting to go to dinner with and who did the sports that we were making stuff for..."
- Sell our products only to those that need them





- “Build the best product. Cause no unnecessary harm. Use business to inspire and implement solutions to the environmental crisis.”
- “Repair is a radical act”
- Common Threads Recycling Program
- Garment repair center in California



Patagonia – environmental philosophy

- Lead an Examined Life.
- Focus on what Patagonia can do to reduce, neutralize or even reverse the root causes of climate change. The horizon of responsibility includes:
 - Support grassroots activists by paying an Earth Tax
 - Empower the customers by making quality products that can be repaired
 - Create a vision of a new approach to business
 - Reduce the environmental impact of Patagonia and its supply chain



Philosophy of business: Repair is a radical act.

- “To make one of our best-selling jackets require 135 liter water. By repairing it, you will save many natural resources, C02 emissions and waste.” “Don’t buy what you don’t need. Think twice before you buy anything”. (Patagonia’s ad).
- Quality is defined and measured by a product’s durability, reparability, multi-functionality, non-obsolescence and lack of environmental harm.
- “Worn wear.” is one environmental program. The message is “invest in quality and repair when things break, and celebrate the clothing that travels with us through life.” Patagonia has the largest garment repair center in USA, located in California.

The West and the East meets in the Spiritual approach to Frugality and Buddhist economics

- Wise consumption
 - The realization of true wellbeing is based upon the Middle way, the right amount and moderation. This is the **idea of balance**. Knowing moderation is knowing how much is “just right”. It is not about satisfaction of desires, but an amount appropriate to the attainment of wellbeing.
- Not harming oneself or other sentient beings (with toxic chemicals, plastics and fossil fuels etc.)
- Buddhist economics consists of a theory and vocabulary of human nature that are **holistic, compact and practical**.
- We do find exemplary cases of frugal and spiritual business leaders (e.g. the Trappist Brewery of Westmalle in Belgium (Bouckaert 2008), as well as in the company Patagonia – with a Zen – inspired leader).



**Growth should be balanced.
Quantitative – Material Growth should be balanced
with Qualitative - Spiritual Growth. Deer cannot
choose, but human beings can, and should!**

