

The challenge of a Buddhist economy

Beyond frontiers

Prof. dr. Hendrik Opdebeeck



- 1. Gross National Product versus Gross National Happiness**
- 2. The Economy confronted with Ethics and Justice**
- 3. The Bodhisattva developing paramitas**

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1. Gross National Product versus Gross National Happiness

We see how the idea of *Gross National Happiness* has been evolving into an economic theory and making its way to other countries.

It has also been affirmed as a “fundamental human goal” by the United Nations.

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2. Economy, Ethics and Justice

Aristotle talked about the distinction between *chrematistics* (the art of getting rich, with all the consequences involved) and *oikonomia* (the art of being responsible for our human household).

During the same period as Aristotle, Buddhist philosophy sought to bridge the gap between these two aspirations: on the one hand, the desire for liberation from anxious (material) suffering, and on the other, the human quest for a happy life.

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2. Economy, Ethics and Justice

Could the suffering from which the economy originates, but which it also aggravates (burnout at the workplace, inequality, pollution of the environment), be corrected through ethics?

Since Aristotle, the central ethical concept of the economy turns out to be that of justice.

2. Economy, Ethics and Justice

Gross National Happiness emerged in a country like Bhutan, where Buddhism accords a central place to responsibility as compassion for one's fellow man and with nature.

Every human being in society is as valuable as any other: through compassion we therefore rediscover the importance of more equality.

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A responsible company manager is a bodhisattva.

In the West, we might call such a responsible manager “spiritually inspired”.

The European company Decathlon declares that it “wants to make sports accessible to everyone”.

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3. The Bodhisattva developing paramitas

The Buddhist discussion of responsibility as compassion goes beyond the concept of sustainability.

Sustainability in the business world is often nothing more than window dressing

3. The Bodhisattva developing paramitas

Crucial historical events or evolutions such as the climate crisis can provide an incentive to rediscover the tradition of the Great Vehicle

One might try out the neologism “mercy-ability” instead of sustainability.

Only when we stop doing this can we rediscover economy as a source of compassion, blessings, gifts, let’s say happiness.

3. The Bodhisattva developing paramitas

The importance of developing paramitas

Like

wisdom, discipline, diligence, patience, generosity
and meditative concentration

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Thanks a lot for your attention.

Now, the floor is yours !

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