“Buddhist Economics”

Prof. Clair Brown

Summer 2019

**Book (required)**

*Buddhist Economics: an enlightened approach to the dismal science,* Clair Brown (Bloomsbury Press, 2017)

**Read book before the class begins. Be ready to discuss it, and choose your topics to explore, at first class meeting.**

Other readings will be made available by instructor or online, or can be ordered on your own.

**Participate in one debate (required)**

**Format for debate:** Each debate has A team and B team with specific questions to address different (conflicting) ways of framing and solving a problem, based on a chapter from the book *Buddhist Economics.*

Each team has 10 minutes to argue their position, using ppt file that presents the points (with data or evidence). 20 mins

Students from class ask a question (one Q for each team). Q (1 min) with reply (2-3 mins)

Class discussion and feedback (Professor’s comments; class discussion). 5-10 mins

See: <http://asiasociety.org/tibetan-buddhist-debate> for a look at how the Tibetan Buddhist monks debate vigorously (slapping their hands to make important points).

**Short report (required) on one government policy** that would be part of a Buddhist economy (last class).

**Clair Brown:  Why I teach a Buddhist Economics Seminar**

Many students in my Econ 1 class at UC Berkeley were frustrated with the assumption that “more is better”---having more income and what it buys is what makes people better off. They also were shocked that economics did not compare the wellbeing across different income groups---the rich benefited just as much as the poor from another dollar of income, and income per capita compared quality of life across countries. As a Buddhist practitioner, I asked “How would Buddha have taught Econ 1?”

In the economic model, it makes sense to go shopping if you are feeling pain, because buying things makes you feel better. Yet we know from experience that consuming more does not relieve pain. What if we lived in a society that did not put consumption at its center? What if we follow instead the Buddhist mandate to minimize suffering, and are driven by compassion rather than desire? To explore these questions with an alternative economic model, I developed this Sophomore seminar “Buddhist Economics” and wrote the book, *Buddhist Economics: An Enlightened Approach to the Dismal Science*, published by Bloomsbury Press (Feb 2017).

Let’s explore together!

**Class 1: Read book *Buddhist Economics***before class has first meeting. Presentation of Buddhist Economics—the foundations, the structure, and the path to creating a Buddhist economy. Discuss the importance of interdependence and impermanence.

* Discuss *Buddhist Economics*, chapters 1, 2 and 3
* Form debate teams. Set up debates.

*Buddhist Economics,* Discuss Chapter 3

Teams breakout to work on debates.

**Class 2: Interconnected with Earth (sustainability) and with Each Other (Shared Prosperity**

*Buddhist Economics,* Discuss Chapters 4 and 5

Class discussion: come prepared to ask a question, and to discuss questions in class.

**Class 3: Measuring Economic Performance as Quality of Life**

*Economics,* Discuss Chapter 6

**Class 4: Work on Debate with Team (Professor**

**Class 5-6: Debates (4 debates; 45 mins each)**

* Debate 1A: People are selfish and greedy is the correct assumption about human nature, and the unregulated pursuit of self-interest is the optimal policy that maximizes people’s happiness and social welfare.
* Debate 1B: The Buddhist economic assumption that everyone is interdependent with each other and the planet, and so humans are altruistic and care for each other, is the correct assumption about human nature. An economy that supports people caring for each other and for the planet, rather than focusing on wealth and consumption, maximizes people’s happiness and social welfare.
* Debate 2A: A free market economy uses the environment to maximize consumption, and assumes the economy can grow without limit.
* Debate 2B: The Buddhist economy respects human interdependence with earth’s ecosystems and caring for the earth can stop climate change.
* Debate 3A: Global inequality reflects market forces, and not a country’s power and history, so rich countries have no responsibility for the suffering by the poor and displaced around the world.
* Debate 3B: Rich countries used natural resources from colonies and cheap fossil fuel energy to develop while they emitted greenhouse gases. Today the rich countries have an obligation to provide resources to the developing countries to improve their standard of living without using fossil fuels.
* Debate 4A: Average GDP, without caring about the income distribution or environmental degradation, provides an accurate and consistent way to measure and compare national well-being across countries.
* Debate 4B: A holistic measure of the economy, such as the GPI or GNH, is required to measure of quality of life, and needs to replace the GDP to measure and compare national well-being of countries.

**Class 7: How to create a Buddhist economy (Sustainable Shared-Properity Policy Index**

*Buddhist Economics,* Discuss Chapter 7.

Read paper on “Creating a Buddhist Economy: the Sustainable Shared-Prosperity Policy Index (SSPI)”; efile provided.

**Assignment:** Choose one specific policy for creating a holistic Buddhist economy that supports meaningful balanced lives for all in a sustainable world. See if you can find data that represents if countries have this policy. **Write a short paragraph** that describes the policy, its intended goal or target, the data that might measure if a country has or uses this policy, and include the data source if you found data. “Speed presentation” in class.

**Optional Reading:**

The best sources for related reading for a chapter in *Buddhist Economics* are the notes in *Buddhist Economics* (by chapter and page number, at back of book).

Also here is short list for some suggested readings:

Excellent beginner’s guide to meditation: <https://promo.lionsroar.com/h2m-special-edition/?utm_source=Lion%27s+Roar+Newsletter&utm_campaign=4644f76532-Announcing+H2M&utm>

Some suggested supplementary readings for topics covered in Econ 84:

Amartya Sen, “Development as Capability Expansion” [*http://morgana.unimore.it/Picchio\_Antonella/Sviluppo%20umano/svilupp%20umano/Sen%20development.pdf*](http://morgana.unimore.it/Picchio_Antonella/Sviluppo%20umano/svilupp%20umano/Sen%20development.pdf)

When you have time, read Sen, *Development as Freedom*, a book that changed the way we think about and evaluate poverty (and won Sen the Nobel prize).

[E. F. Schumacher](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/E._F._Schumacher), “Buddhist Economics”, *Small Is Beautiful* <http://enlight.lib.ntu.edu.tw/FULLTEXT/JR-ADM/schumaa.htm> This is the origin of term “Buddhist Economics”.

Bhutan Gross National Happiness: <http://www.grossnationalhappiness.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Short-GNH-Index-edited.pdf>

Explore the World Happiness Report (2012 to 2019)

<https://worldhappiness.report/download/>

See World Happiness Report 2013, Chapters 2 and 8.

<https://worldhappiness.report/ed/2013/>

See World Happiness Report 2017, chapters 1, 2, and 5.

<https://worldhappiness.report/ed/2017/>

“Beyond GDP: Measuring and Achieving Global Genuine Progress”, Kubiszewski et al, *Ecological Economics* 93 (2013) 57-68 (This paper is available on our bCourse site.)

M. Ricard, *Altruism* (2015). Read Introduction, Chs 1, 6, 14, 20, 39.

D.S. Wilson, *Does Altruism Exist?* (Yale, 2015) Ch. 7.

J. D. Sachs, *The Age of Sustainable Development* (Columbia, 2015). This textbook, based on the UN’s model of inclusive, sustainable economic growth, covers the territory. Read according to what topics interest you (eg, health care, starvation, climate change).

J. Stiglitz, *The Price of Inequality*, 2013.

*The Heart of the Buddha’s Teaching* by Thich Nhat Hanh.