

Between the Shoals

Keeping An Open Perspective for Policy and Society

Bob Goudzwaard

English translation of

Tussen de Klippen Door

*Om het openhouden van perspectieven
voor beleid en samenleving.*

Lecture on the occasion of his retirement
as professor Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam,
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Between the Schoals

Keeping Perspectives Open for Policy and Society

Bob Goudzwaard

The final question is not, “How do I leave the stage as a hero?” but “How will the next generation live on?” Only from this question, posed from taking a stand of responsibility toward the past, can fruitful solutions emerge, even if they initially align poorly with our sense of honor.¹

These famous words by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, written in Berlin-Tegel prison (Bonhoeffer, 1968: 13), repeatedly crossed my mind while preparing for this farewell lecture. Saying goodbye, after all, implies a changing of the guard; it means attempting to pass on something valuable to one's successors. After all, the next generation must be able to live on - and that includes a generation of students, of future academics. But what can be said or conveyed when such profound uncertainty prevails in science and society about the challenges facing us at the dawn of this new millennium? Leaving the stage as a pseudo-hero doesn't seem so crazy after all.²

Let me then try to clarify where my problem lies. Twenty-six years ago, I entered the Vrije Universiteit at Amsterdam in the now almost forgotten Woestduincentrum.³ The subject of my argument then, in 1972, was the relationship between economics and the idea of progress (Goudzwaard, 1974). This theme was partly inspired by the fault lines that had become visible in the early 1970s after a period of virtually uninterrupted economic progress. Thus, financial stability in the world left much to be desired, just as it does now.⁴ Forms of structural unemployment were looming on the horizon, and the solution to global poverty had proven more difficult than initially anticipated. And last but not least, many, including myself, began to worry about the future of the environment.

¹ BCW Note: The Eberhard Bethke edited rendition as translated and published in Dutch reads: *De laatste vraag is niet: hoe verlaat ik als held het toneel, maar hoe zal de volgende generatie verder leven? Alleen uit deze vraag, gesteld vanuit verantwoordelijkheid tegenover de geschiedenis, kunnen oplossingen ontstaan die vruchtbaar zijn, al zullen ze aanvankelijk weinig stroken met ons eergevoel.* The statement continues: *Kortom, het is veel gemakkelijker in principe een zaak trouw te blijven, dan in concrete verantwoordelijkheid.* This can be translated as: *In short, it is much easier to remain loyal to a cause in [affirming a] principle than to be loyal to a cause in concrete [acts of] responsibility.* (Bold italics mine - BCW)

² BCW Note: Goudzwaard is adopting an ironic, self-deprecating tone in the face of the problems and “profound uncertainty” that prevails.
Dutch: *Het verlaten van de toneel als pseudo-held lijkt dan zo gek nog niet.*

³ BCW Note: A church hall near to the university where university ceremonies were regularly held.
<https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Woestduinkerker>

⁴ BCW Note: *Zo liet de financiële stabiliteit in de wereld veel te wensen over, net zoals nu.* As with much of Goudzwaard's writings there is the occasional retrospective outlook which suggests a vivid ongoing sense of what was then happening.

But at the same time, in those years, there was still a strong sense that action was needed for things like these. Persistent poverty in the South? Well, then it was time to seriously consider whether the international economic order wasn't due for an overhaul. Environmental problems? Well, then we also had to consider significant changes in the production structure. At that time, in response [6] to the first report to the Club of Rome, **The Limits to Growth** (Meadows, 1972), reports emerged, such as that of the Mansholt Commission (of the Labour Party, Democrats 66, and the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy) and the report **Reasonable Doubt** by the Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA). Both of these relativized the objective of maximum economic growth. And as for combating unemployment or inflation, there was also the opportunity at that time to fall back on the brilliant thinking of the first Nobel Prize winner in Economics and founder of the 'theory of economic policy', Jan Tinbergen (1903-1994).⁵

Yes, in those years you could indeed get students excited about work that was still to be done. In retrospect, and without exaggeration, all of this was certainly possible, but what a difference that was from what is before us now! Not only has faith in the malleability of society declined sharply (at least politically; in the economic sphere, the opposite now seems to be the case), but many policy instruments have also lost their effectiveness. For example, the queen of Keynesian policy instruments, budgetary policy, has largely fallen into disuse; reducing the budget deficit has now even been downgraded from an instrument to one of the policy objectives.⁶ And with the fall of the Berlin Wall, the idea of possible changes to the global economic order also seems to have fallen out of fashion. After all, according to many, there is no other option than to adapt as best one can to the given external developments (TINA: there is no alternative⁷). At the end of the 1970s, our own Planning Bureau did not get any further than **Scanning the Future** (CPB, 1992), scanning the future like radar does in situations of an almost impenetrable fog.

But what can we still pass on to future academics? Can the next generation even survive in this way by constant adaptation to the demands of the moment? This question is all the more pressing because, as with a ship sailing in dense fog, immensely dangerous cliffs can seemingly appear out of nowhere. In the past quarter century, the economy in most Western countries has undergone fantastic development. Average prosperity has more than doubled, and many new products have become

⁵ BCW Note: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jan_Tinbergen

⁶ BCW Note: Goudzwaard's 1981 assessment of this downgrading, midstream as it were, can be found in the volume of proceedings of the Dutch "Post-Keynesian Economic Group" with responses from colleagues, Jan Tinbergen in particular. "Economische waarde en de doeleinden en instrumenten van economisch beleid" in B de Gaay Fortman (ed) **Economie en Waarde** Samsom Uitgeverij Alphen aan den Rijn/Brussel 1982. pp. 137-162. (originally published with a response by J. Tinbergen pp.164-169).

⁷ BCW Note: Bob's rejection of Mrs Thatcher's TINA had already been heard in his various contributions around the world. A lecture for the April 15 1999 Silver Jubilee of Yayasan Bimbingan Kesajahteraan Sosial (Social Welfare Guidance Foundation YBKS), Surakarta, Central Java, Indonesia, states: "... it has also be said loudly and clearly, that the suggestion that there are no concrete alternatives (TINA) is simply not true. This is not only a lie related to the world-economy as a whole, but it is also not true for countries like Indonesia. Against TINA there is TATA: There Are (a) Thousand Alternatives, as it was so beautifully said in the 1996 conference YBKS helped to organise on globalization at Petra University in Surabaya." <https://tukampendatastore.blob.core.windows.net/neocalvinism/allofliferedeemed/Goudzwaard/BG78.pdf> Bob did not hold back from challenging such fatalism.

available to millions. That is certainly something to be thankful for. But can the ship continue sailing in the same way? Put it this way; this is about more than just whether students can progress. It's also about whether we are going to be collectively capable of keep an open perspective for a responsible society in its entirety.

So, this also largely determines the route we will take this afternoon. First, I want with you to try to present a clearer picture of what has actually changed so much since 1972 so that now we can realize we've landed in a fog. From there, I want to raise the question, in a somewhat [7] unusual way - warning you in advance! - as to whether this fog is actually real in all respects. Couldn't it in part be the result of a narrowing of our own perspective? Based on this exploration, perhaps a better understanding can be gained of the nature of the cliffs, still so partially hidden behind the fog. On this route we naturally arrive at our actual theme: how can we maintain the hope that there is still some sailing to be done that can travel between the cliffs?⁸

Three Areas of Change

Since 1972, the challenges facing economic policy have fundamentally changed in at least three areas: their interdependence, the degree of monetization, and their degree of paradoxicality.

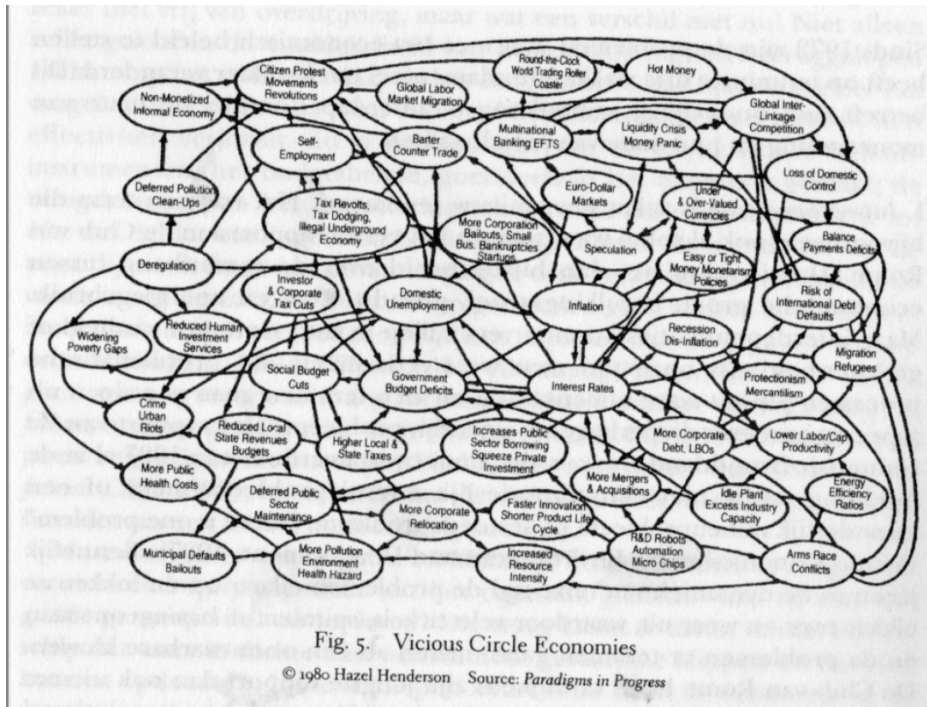
I *Interdependence* is certainly not a new phenomenon. The term, for example, was already featured prominently in the first report to the Club of Rome, which addressed the relationship between economic growth, population growth, the use of raw materials and energy. But interdependencies can vary in their degree of rigidity or complexity. In our time, we increasingly see problematic processes clumped⁹ together, appearing as aspects of a deeper underlying problem. The Brundtland Commission's report, **Our Common Future**, of 1987, already noted this in its introduction: there is no longer a separate energy, environmental or poverty problems: no, it said "there is one problem" (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987).

Apparently, in the dynamics of our times, problems drive each other and trigger each other back and forth, creating many circles, spirals, or loops, with the problems

⁸ BCW Note: In this exaugural or valedictory lecture, Professor Goudzwaard is still very much the university lecture, the teacher who seeks to "think along" with his students, and in this case his audience and his readers. The theme of "thinking along with" is part of what he had learned of reformational philosophy from Professor J P A Mekkes when he as a young student entered the University at Rotterdam. See Sander Griffioen "Thinking along with Mekkes" *Philosophia Reformata* 82, pp. 26-42. Goudzwaard developed his contribution in which his "thinking along with" his colleagues constituted a necessary and enduring part of his vocational contribution, even if his colleagues might wonder why he should go to such lengths to understand the logic of their theoretical contributions. This is an important theme of "immanent critique", we might say "immanent theoretical practise" suggested by the transcendental critique of theoretical thought developed by Dooyeweerd, Mekkes and others, a scholarly service committed to scientific communication that presupposes solidarity with scholarly neighbours.

⁹ BCW Note: Dutch term: *samenklitten* - "clumped together". This suggests a necessary deepening in the way in which Goudzwaard refined his language to explain and explore the issues he had outlined on the first page of his "Introduction: a statement of the problem" to his major work **Capitalism and Progress** (1976/1978 and English translation 1979). "*When we try to discover the causes of the accumulation of present-day problems in western society and attempt to establish how these problems are mutually interdependent, we soon notice that in large measure they are related to societal structurations. Often they are entirely intertwined with the structure or architecture of western society as a whole. The problems of inflation and unemployment readily illustrate this.*" (p.xix)

collectively appearing as a single, inextricable tangle. According to its latest report, the Club of Rome needs new words for this, such as “problématique” and “resolutique” (King & Schneider, 1991). The word “resolutique” is also necessary, because indeed, in this tangle, even partial solutions are increasingly disappearing. In her book **Building a Win-Win World** (Henderson 1996:31), Hazel Henderson provides a beautiful picture of this contemporary tangle of problems, share with you below.¹⁰



Let me give you an example of how this works. Unemployment breeds poverty, but poverty, in turn, reduces people’s chances of finding work. In large parts of Africa, increased poverty also leads to additional damage to nature, which in turn exacerbates poverty. Poverty also leads to refugee flows that [8] cause military tensions. But a greater need for weapons, especially in

the Global South, also reduces the means to combat poverty. Moreover, migration flows are social movements that destabilize society; we see this effect now beginning to spread deep into the countries of the Western Hemisphere. Just as the South’s persistent debt burdens are also costing jobs here in the West. As a result, between 1981 and 1983 alone, Europe and the United States lost some two to three million jobs (Susan George, 1988: 121).

Sometimes negative effects seek each other out. For example, in East Germany, social tensions are increasing due to the combination of increased migration and shrinking employment. In this way, downward spirals can also reinforce each other. The negative effects then tumble over each other in a tangled mess, forming a tangle in which one searches in vain for a beginning or an end. Jürgen Moltmann, rightly speaks

¹⁰ BCW Note: This is Hazel Henderson’s description of the situation she was seeking to address in **Building a Win-Win World** 1980 work **Paradigms in Progress** .p.38. All countries face the global economic warfare scenario of cutthroat competition, creeping budget deficits, and jobless growth, as well as the other vicious circles described throughout Part I. (see Vicious Circle Economies.) Yet these vicious circles are now serving as flash points for transition — all the crises in the global casino have provided the needed if painful feedback. Just as feedback from individuals is vital if we are to enhance democracy and improve decisionmaking processes at all levels, so feedback from consumers is vital to correct prices and guide business decisions and capital markets. By 1995 it was widely acknowledged that the price system does not reflect many social and environmental costs or longer-term impacts of production on future generations. Most economic textbooks advocate discount rates in cost-benefit analyses that systematically lower time horizons by calculations of “present value” that deem worthless any benefits not realized within ten years. This narrow-gauge, short-term maximization formula still underlies most economic decision making, not only in the private-sector markets but also in government projects, bond issues, etc. This formula also pervades macroeconomic management.

in this context of progress as *Schicksal*,¹¹ as a fate that can lead us into a series of demonic circles (Moltmann 1987:42).

II Monetization In addition to the intensification¹² of interdependencies, there is a second concern of a fundamental change, the problems that result from an increasing monetization[9]. This term represents the growing weight of financial processes associated with the subjective expectations of the economic life of people.

Every modern economy is characterized by internal relationships between what's called the *real* sphere - the sphere of concrete transactions in goods and services - and the nominal or monetary sphere, which concerns the method of financing all these transactions. This isn't what is new when compared to 1972. But what can be called new is that the foundation of the economy increasingly appears to be determined by the inherent life and dynamics of that financial sector. Approximately 98% of all international economic transactions belong in this sector. As a result, the real sphere becomes a kind of dependent variable at the top of the pyramid. Related to this is the increased role of subjective expectations. In this inverted reality, it is demonstrated time and again that subjective expectations, especially in the short term, can easily trump the so-called real economic determinants. Panic then sets in.¹³

Even now that the inflated balloon of global speculative transactions has partially burst,¹⁴ the money circulating in purely financial transactions worldwide remains many times what is needed to finance normal international trade in goods and services. And this implies increased vulnerability for all national economies. If international capital is leaving your economy for fear of interest and exchange rate losses, beware. You should be wary because this reversal in subjective financial expectations will continue to harm your real economic processes for a long time to come. The degree of sensitivity to the risk of outward capital flows now, more than ever, determines whether a particular country can still afford a hefty tax on profits, its own form of social security, or a complex set of eco-levies. Financial expectations make or break economic reality; and that is what is different from 1972.

III. Paradoxicality A final area of problem shifting is the increasing paradoxical nature of virtually all societal problems. By that I mean that it seems as if each of these problems, at its core, possesses some kind of inner contradiction. My colleague and friend Harry de Lange and I were already working on this in the latest edition of our

¹¹ BCW Note: *schicksal* German - destiny, fate, power that cannot be resisted

¹² BCW Note: The Dutch word *verdichting* also has the sense of increased density. This is also related to "clumped together". see fn. 9 and "samenklitten" above.

¹³ BCW Note: Goudzwaard describes the "inversion of the so-called pyramid of international finance" in his lecture **Globalization and the Kingdom of God** Center for Public Justice 2001 p.23. "... processes of production, consumption and trade of goods and services ... was [previously] the bottom of the pyramid. Finance represented the smaller top of the pyramid and consisted of credit transactions, trade in property claims, and the buying and selling of foreign fixed currencies. Today, however, the pyramid has been turned upside down."

¹⁴ BCW Note: This is a 1999 statement 8 years before the so-called "Global Financial Crisis". See e.g. https://web.archive.org/web/20090210184004/https://ctbi.org.uk/pdf_view.php?id=308 "Underlying causes of the global economic crisis".

book, *Genoeg van te veel, genoeg van te weinig*¹⁵ (Goudzwaard/de Lange 1991/1995), but I'd like here to provide a few more examples.

Unemployment has always existed. But the phenomenon that is relatively new is that unemployment now often occurs in combination with a shortage of labor, at least as measured by the range of societal tasks that have become unfulfillable. This is paradoxical. Shouldn't labor shortages [10] and an abundance of labor, in principle, be able to compensate for each other? Poverty has existed in many forms throughout history. But that poverty returns with increased intensity to wealthy societies is, to say the least, surprising.

In the United States, when Gross National Product rose by over 25% between 1979 and 1980, child poverty simultaneously increased by 21% (Bread for the World 1992: 107). One in four children in the United States now has direct experience of hunger.

The erosion of care, as evidenced by the inadequate paid care for the elderly, the disabled, the sick, and troubled youth, is a third example. Economics shows that expenditures on personal care have a high income elasticity. But why, then, do care shortages increase rather than decrease with our rising incomes? (Eikelboom, 1987)

Time demands are also becoming more pressing, especially when we thought we would finally have more free time. Juliet Schor provides striking examples of this in her book, **The Overworked American** (Schor 1991). Incidentally, this book has a paradoxical subtitle: *the unexpected decline of leisure*.

The examples vary, but the trend toward increased paradoxicality of problems is demonstrable. Despite the intensive growth of environmental technologies, for example, the degree of environmental control is also declining rather than increasing. And Hans Achterhuis, a prominent social philosopher, notes that there is a general scarcity paradox in modern society: with the increase in resource production, the sense of scarcity does not decrease but rather increases (Achterhuis 1988).

An intensification of the interdependence between problems, an increasing degree of the monetization of problems, and an increased degree of paradox - these are shifts with quite different characteristics. But in principle, they work together in the same direction, which we can describe with the philosophical term contingency: there is a combination of indeterminacy, variability, and unpredictability. And this contingency also applies to the economic policy to be pursued. Just think: when problems become entangled and simultaneously begin to exhibit paradoxical features, there is increasing uncertainty about how to properly address any one of them. Add to that the fact that an unexpected change in prevailing financial expectations can throw a spanner in the works, and the uncertainty becomes a fact. The image of a rising mist is perfectly apt, because in dense fog, it is increasingly unclear how one is to steer the ship.

But earlier I promised that I wouldn't leave you with such a paralyzing observation. Is that fog really real in every respect? Or is it also partly based on illusion, on an imagined situation? To find out, [11] we must first try to determine whether there

¹⁵ BCW Note: The translation of the Dutch title is provocative: "Enough of Too Much, Enough of Too Little". This was translated into English as **Beyond Poverty and Affluence: toward an economy of care** Translated and edited by Mark Vander Vennen Eerdman and WCC 1995.

might be a connection between those three shifts.¹⁶ Because that fog certainly won't lift on its own.

The prime candidate for the connection between these three shifts¹⁷ is undoubtedly the phenomenon of increased globalization. Globalization can best be compared to a satellite, which, thanks to two or more booster rockets, eventually ends up in its own orbit around the Earth. The boosters for globalization are well-known: they are increased free trade, the internationalization of technology, and multinationalization of production. Together, they have now caused numerous technical, social, and economic phenomena that from the outset have a global or worldwide character. The weekly magazine *Time* had therefore initially compared globalization to a collective awakening in an other world: “a global awakening of mankind.” (*Time magazine* 1989) The internet, for example, from its inception, has been a global technology. And numerous multinational corporations have already evolved into transnational corporations that are “footloose”, no longer having a mother country. The lion's share of international capital flows now also belongs to the world of “global capital.” This is capital that actually belongs nowhere except in its own orbit around the Earth.

Globalization has significantly increased both the financial component of the problems we face and the role of subjective expectations. The interdependence of the problems has also grown significantly: the effects and risks of human actions extend ever further in space and time. The actual process of globalization, therefore, certainly constitutes part of what we have been seeking, the coherence between these problems.

But is globalization the ultimate key? No, there must be more to it. Certainly not all forms of clustering¹⁸ of problems can be explained by this process.¹⁹ But even more importantly, the role of the increasing paradoxicality of problems remains largely shrouded in obscurity. What actually creates these strange paradoxes, which emerge even in the midst of globalization?



Discovering this isn't impossible, but it is not easy. It is just as difficult as deciding to consciously opening oneself up to a different perspective. The philosopher Michel Foucault once brilliantly illustrated the difficulty of this by referring to a famous painting of Velázquez, *Les Meninas* (*The Ladies of the Court*) (Foucault, 1966).

In that painting, we see the Spanish crown

¹⁶ BCW Note: i.e. interdependencies, monetisation, paradoxes

¹⁷ BG ftn 1 In my opinion, the best currently available sources for studying this phenomenon are: Castells (1996-1998); The Lisbon Group (1996); Gray (1996); Henderson (1996); Korten (1995). Two recent, interesting responses from ecumenical circles are: Van Drimmelen (1998) and DeGaay Fortman/Klein Goldewijk (1998).

¹⁸ BCW Note: “or clumping together” Dutch: *samenklitten*

¹⁹ BCW Note: We have already drawn attention to Goudzwaard's reference to an “intensification” of the mutually reinforcing global problems and hence their apparent mutual intractability.

princess, the Infanta Marguerita, surrounded by court staff, while the painter Velázquez is off to the side, busy creating his own painting - an impossibility in itself. Everyone is looking in our direction as if we are impartial spectators. But is that really true? Note there is a mirror hanging on the wall, and in it, two other people are just visible. They are the king and queen of Spain. They are, as it were, still standing behind us, as spectators. Or rather, and this is the real shock, as spectators, we actually serve no purpose. Because all the gazes on the painting are, of course, not directed at us; they are focused solely on the royal couple, just barely revealed by the mirror. Only by looking outward, into the mirror - “la pensée du dehors”,²⁰ as Foucault puts it - do we discern the one-sidedness of our original gaze.

Might I now ask, with you, whether there is perhaps a similarly limited perspective in our society? Do we live with a [13] perspective that, in other words, systematically hinders us in recognizing and solving certain policy problems and, to return to the image used earlier, thus creates a fog? That is a question that is, of course, extremely sensitive and therefore demands a carefully framed answer. For me, at least, this question compels me to call for reinforcements or, to stick with the metaphor, to hoist a number of auxiliary sails for our voyage between the cliffs. The first sail I set out is the paralogical method from postmodern philosophy.

Three additional auxiliary sails²¹

I Paralogy is a term coined by the postmodern thinker François Lyotard (Lyotard, 1987:159). It refers to knowledge of the nature and origins of paradoxes. It is primarily this knowledge of the origins of paradoxes that interests us here. We must, after all, attempt to find the connecting link between the aforementioned paradoxes: the return of poverty in wealthy societies; a decline in labor input with an increased demand for labor; increasing scarcity with greater resource production; the erosion of care and increasing time demands with an increase in prosperity. The method of paralogy therefore requires that we first determine their common characteristics.

Two things stand out here. First, all these paradoxes relate to the world of money and goods; therefore, they are economic in nature. But second, and this might be more important, they all also relate to the tension (or, if you prefer, the conflict) between what moves, between what changes rapidly in modern society in economic terms, and what stands still or progresses less rapidly. Apparently, it is at this fault line that paradoxes arise. Just consider this: healthcare has lower, less dynamic productivity growth than, for example, industrial labor. Paid care will therefore become increasingly expensive, given general income growth geared to the productivity of the stronger sectors. Given its scope, care will therefore be doomed to lag behind.²² Time and nature are both inherently given; they are not dynamic. Therefore, in a dynamic universe, they will first become visible in their limitations, their scarcity, their

²⁰ BCW Note: Fr. trans: “the thought from the outside”

²¹ BCW Note: The terms of this heading expands the essay’s title by suggesting three extra ways to negotiate the winds as we seek to sail between the cliffs and avoid shipwreck.

²² BCW Note: Where economic growth is measured in terms of increased productivity the so-called “service sector” concerned with “care” is simply doomed to lag behind. Consider hospitals, universities and community housing for needy persons - what can “growth in productivity” mean?

restrictions, and not in their positive qualities. New poverty, according to recent scientific research, arises primarily as a consequence of disadvantages, of forms of social exclusion in a dynamic society. Poverty in this sense can therefore grow as societal dynamism accelerates (Wilson, 1987). And doesn't this economic dynamism also increase the magnitude of all competing needs, causing the awareness of scarcity not to diminish, but rather to increase?²³

[14] Fortunately, you might be thinking, the paradoxes can be clarified after all. Yes, that's true; but the real question is whether that increases the prospect of a solution? This is rarely the case, if at all. The only consolation seems to be that we now know how these paradoxes arise. They grow into realities in a society in which dynamics, and especially economic dynamics, have influenced the dominant direction of our perception. Because once you've all taken your place in such a speeding spaceship, everything that stands still or moves more slowly will indeed be perceived as actually going backwards and therefore as lagging behind.

Now, there are various ways to deal with this lag. You can lament it and attempt to find financial compensation for it from within the economic dynamism. A significant portion of our social and environmental spending stems from this need for corrective aftercare. So it's possible, but it is and remains expensive. More obvious in a dynamic universe, is to regard the lag as irrelevant or even a nuisance. It is a nuisance insofar as it slows or hinders our progress, and irrelevant insofar as it doesn't serve progress. Is that perhaps also our dominant perspective? There are indications that this is so. Indeed, even in official policy documents, we now encounter the labeling of the disabled, women on welfare, the unemployed, and the elderly as the so-called "inactive"; of the nations and cultures of the Global South as the so-called "developing countries", while in society as a whole, nature and the environment are often approached as what primarily imposes limitations and sets boundaries. I believe such labeling says more about our own perspective than about the actual value of what stands still or grows more slowly. We encounter here, as it were, a cultural characteristic that we can best describe, with Anna Terruwe (1911-2004),²⁴ as the tendency toward (dynamic) self-affirmation (Terruwe, 1991). This implies that one's own progress is considered more decisive than the precare²⁵ or affirmation that others require.

II This impression is further reinforced when I raise a second sail, namely that of ideology analysis. This seems a strange and even somewhat worn-out sail, especially in a time when the grand narratives and ideologies are supposedly obsolete. But that changes somewhat when we return to the classical origins of the concept of ideology, as found in the work of the French philosopher, Destutt de Tracy (1754-1836). For him, all human ideas are so many forms of consciousness open to influence.

²³ BCW Note: The above paragraph needs to be read a few times, and slowly, to appreciate how Goudzwaard is addressing the paradoxicality of problems "clumped together" and intensified under monetization, as time and nature become hurdles to overcome, or ignored.

²⁴ BCW Note: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anna_Terruwe

²⁵ BCW Note: Dutch: *voorzorg* Literally: pre-care. It suggests an ethic of putting others before oneself, but also of putting other's time-table ahead of one's own time-table needs.

Therefore, they can be transformed in and by society into useful elements for achieving common good purposes (Kennedy, 1978). In other words, ideologies arise when certain social goals are deemed so important [15] that they are allowed to bend human ideas, including norms and values. This is especially the case when it is useful to justify the means or instruments that are necessary to achieve those goals, or to place them on a pedestal from which they can exercise their ordering power over society like gods.

Let me now, for a moment, apply this reasoning to the social goal of further increasing prosperity. While this phenomenon has existed throughout the ages, it has taken on a highly systematic form in our time. It seemingly brings many goals within our reach: not only luxury and more free time, but also more work, less poverty, more care, and abundance. If I now assume that the importance of all these goals is considered significant enough to more or less prioritize the necessary means - such as the means of persistently fierce market competition and a continuous increase in productivity in all economic sectors - then the following diagram shows that in such an ideological climate, paradoxical outcomes easily arise:

Direction of ideological transformation
(left to right)

wishes, desires and claims	translation to economic processes	brought together in a force field (or tunnel)	exclusions and other side effects	(part) results
abundance	more resources		emergence of more needs	scarcity
happiness	higher standard of living		new poverty	new poverty
meaningful work	more jobs	processes of raising productivity leading to rising income levels in the context of competition and rivalry	emergence of disadvantaged groups and countries	structural unemployment
care	valuable care		modernisation & automation	erosion of care
peace	greater safety		increase in armaments	conflict
rest	more free time		high time demands and higher demands on time	more haste (24 hour economy)

(16) The diagram shows two perspectives. One runs from center to the left. This perspective demonstrates great confidence in the market-based means of growth, competition, and increased productivity to achieve increased happiness and abundance. The other line runs from left to right. It indicates the steps of the actual ideological transformation in society. First comes the step by which universal human

ideals, such as happiness, are reduced to economically feasible goals such as greater material prosperity and more jobs. Then comes the step of selecting and deploying the most effective means, which brings society into the tunnel of what Manuel Castells has called “the commanding processes” of “productivity and competitiveness” (Castells, 1998: 341).²⁶ And finally, there is the step in which the fault lines begin to have certain adverse effects, which can develop into the complete paradoxes in the right-hand column.

The results of this analysis, I believe, confirm my assumption that the current pursuit of prosperity in Western countries indeed harbors ideological components. These components apparently also influence the current Western-dominated globalization of the world economy.

This is certainly not a joyful or honorable observation, but it is important. It is becoming increasingly clear that the paradoxes we encounter nationally and globally as seemingly accomplished facts, do not stem from some kind of doom. According to this analysis, they each have their origins *in a reduced view of reality*.²⁷ Time and again, it appears that the reality within which the goals must be achieved is richer and more complex than assumed in the thinking and action patterns of the dominant perspective. For happiness naturally has more dimensions than the growth of prosperity, just as peace has more dimensions than security enforced by weapons, and nature is more than a collection of productive resources. And it is precisely these other, often more static, dimensions that are marginalized when the happiness goal, reduced to the growth of prosperity, is allowed to spread throughout society. This happens in such a way that society can select or recruit at will the natural and social resources it needs for this shared adventure. It is precisely in the unmeasurable, unproducible, qualitative dimensions that happiness then recedes - that is, the dimensions that do not seem sufficiently relevant to the dynamics of the system. I quote Manuel Castells once more: “*A dynamic global economy has been [17] constituted around the planet, linking up valuable people and activities all over the world, while switching off from the networks of power and wealth, people and territories dubbed as irrelevant from the perspective of dominant interests*” (Castells, 1998: 1). In this way, problems can indeed return to you like a kind of boomerang.

III But if so much depends on the right perspective, what is the current state of perspective in economics? It is with joy that I can report some breakthroughs on this very point, which are now shaking to its foundations the mechanically closed paradigm of the neo-classical school. For example, the work of the Indian economist Amartya Sen has received public recognition in the form of a Nobel Prize. In his research into the causes of poverty and famine, he emphasizes the role of failing economic actors, who devalue the existing entitlements of the economically disadvantaged. Sen also criticizes the avoidance of any form of normative analysis in

²⁶ BG ftn. 2 “Productivity and competitiveness are the commanding processes of the informational/global economy. Productivity essentially stems from innovation, competitiveness from flexibility. Thus, firms, regions, countries, economic units of all kinds, gear their production relationships to maximize innovation and flexibility.”

²⁷ BCW Note: Italics added for emphasis.

mainstream economics publications: *“If one examines the balance of emphasis in the publications in modern economics, it is hard not to notice the eschewal of deep normative analysis”* (Sen, 1987: 7). This is encouraging. I also think of the work of various authors from the New Institutional Economics school, who view respect for norms and values as a form of social capital and therefore consider their preservation directly economically relevant (North, 1990). This suggests a wonderful basis for the continued impact of the values and norms project of the Vrije Universiteit, I think. Neo-institutionalists are now even beginning to undermine the very existence of given preferences in economics, which recently led my colleague Van de Klundert to say: *“If preferences are also endogenous, neoclassical theory loses its last hold”* (Van de Klundert, 1998: 20).

And last but not least, within the field of economics, I would like to mention the pioneering work of Herman Daly. In a series of increasingly convincing publications (Daly, 1977; 1989; 1993; 1996), he demonstrated that an economy that reduces economic reality to a universe of only measurable flows (of income, production, consumption, and so on) surrenders itself to misplaced concreteness.²⁸ This is because it refuses to account for the permanent impact that such economic flows have on the (predominantly static) reserves of natural, cultural, and social capital. Here, the dynamic narrowing of the economic worldview is identified as the direct source of numerous wrong decisions.²⁹

Looming Cliffs

This brings me back to the beginning of my argument, to the lack of stability that characterizes current economic policy. The fog has lifted somewhat, and we can indeed see a bit further. However, this doesn't inspire cheer. For we discover, with some alarm, that several cliffs are looming right before us. I will mention four of them.

1. To the extent that poverty in the world is indeed increasingly characterized by deprivation and exclusion, it will obviously not diminish in the current highly dynamic economy. It will even return, intensified by and through this dynamic, especially if there is no room for sufficient financial compensation. As we have already seen, this type of poverty cannot be combated by increased growth. In the United States, it has already become clear that this is equivalent to mopping with the tap running (Goudzwaard 1996:49 ff.). The first obstacle is and remains the obstacle of the new poverty.³⁰

²⁸ BCW Note: The “fallacy of misplaced concreteness” was an important facet of the philosophy of science developed by Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947) in his **Science and the Modern World** (1925).

²⁹ BG ftn 3 A separate publication from the Multidisciplinary Centre for Church and Society (MCKS) has vigorously addressed the risks that a similar reductionist worldview has posed and continues to pose for the shaping of Dutch economic policy (B. Goudzwaard et al., 1994). The publication was the result of a collaborative project by economists and sociologists: B. Goudzwaard, L. Laeyendecker, H.M. de Lange, Mady A. Thung, H.J. Tieleman, and J. van Wezel.

³⁰ BG ftn 3 This also applies in a period of economic slowdown. Ideologically, the main reaction then is to pull out all the stops to restore growth as strongly as possible. The pressure on society to adapt doesn't diminish, but rather increases, even if that requires a further reduction in social spending.

2. To the extent that migration flows worldwide are fueled by existing income and prosperity disparities, it must also be said of them that they can only increase further in and through the current economic dynamism. Jan Tinbergen has emphatically pointed out since the 1970s that the unwillingness of the wealthy West to share access to the sources of prosperity with the Global South could lead to flows of people of unprecedented magnitude. He reiterated this in stark terms in his last work before his death (Tinbergen n.d:25). The West's desperate attempt to maintain its dynamism could well lead to disastrous consequences in this very area. For in the tangle of interdependencies, increasing social tensions certainly also disrupt the economy.

3. Public finances currently seem like a beacon in the sea. But upon closer inspection, they turn out to be a formidable rock. The salient point is that in an economically dynamic universe, the public sector as a whole is among the very slow growers. The productivity of a judge, a teacher, a social worker, or a police officer barely increases from year to year. Even in a climate of relatively limited wage and salary increases, the costs of these services [19] will therefore increase more than proportionally. Simply maintaining them already requires a rising tax burden. But in a dynamic universe, more is needed than just maintaining them. More and more backlogs are emerging, and almost all of them will demand financial compensation in some form. I therefore predict that within a few years, the budget balance will be finally fragmented by the economic dynamism itself, between the shear blade of the lagging productivity of government services on the one hand and that of the increasing demands on the government on the other. The suggestion is still being made in the country³¹ that the current systematic austerity measures will soon come to an end, for example with the introduction of the Euro. However, I advise you to forget that. It's ideological nonsense and economically inconsistent.

4. The final and perhaps most dangerous obstacle is the already excessive burden placed on the carrying capacity of humans and the environment. The impact of systematically exceeding environmental limits will undoubtedly become more visible, and not only in climatic conditions. The World Wildlife Fund estimates that between 1970 and 1995, approximately one-third of the Earth's natural resources disappeared, while the number of fish in the sea has also fallen by a third in the last quarter century. Due to the combination of population and prosperity growth, biodiversity is now also declining at an alarming rate. And as for the human capacity to adapt to these changes, the newspaper *Trouw* recently demonstrated, in an impressive series of articles, that people are exposed to stress in the majority of work situations. Thus, the maximum dynamism of economic flows apparently trumps, time and again, the economic interest of conserving natural resources. But how long can this continue? The founder of this university, Abraham Kuyper, warned more than a century ago about the danger that Western man and society would give in to what he called the mystique of infinite progress, the mystique of a *processus ad infinitum*. According to him, this would lead

³¹ BCW Note: Goudzwaard is evidently referring to public policy debate within The Netherlands.

to what he called the cratistocracy of brutal monetary power (Kuyper, 1994: 154 ff.).³² Was he completely wrong?³³

Sailing between the cliffs

Is sailing between such cliffs still possible? Yes, I think it is still possible for the Netherlands and Europe, but then the course will have to be partially changed. The almost blind adherence to the compass of maximum economic dynamism will then have to be partially corrected by the realism of what people can still handle and what nature can sustain. And the societal perspective also needs a corresponding adjustment. It will have to be aimed at saturation in at least a number of vital areas. In short, it's about the courage to collectively take a look in a mirror, which, besides healthy fear, can also bring us well-founded hope: *en l'espoir du dehors*.³⁴

When we attempt to look through the mirror at that part of reality that exists outside the universe of swift and purposeful movement, we can discern at least three beacons that indicate a different and safer course. These three beacons correspond to the three major shifts I signaled at the beginning of my discussion and, together, form the conclusion of my argument. They are, respectively, the beacons of the reverse spiral, of real economic anchoring, and of free economic action.³⁵

1. In this day and age, as we saw at the beginning, we are faced with a tangle of problems that seem to be dragging us into a series of downward spirals. To counter this form of doom-mongering, a sobering observation is appropriate. It is extremely unlikely that in a society where numerous negative spirals are developing, there wouldn't also be circles or spirals that work in the opposite direction, i.e., positively and upwardly. After all, if problems mutually reinforce each other, their solutions will naturally also do so in turn. That is the first beacon. It requires that we address the interconnectedness of problems in policy terms in such a way that the steps are

³² BG ftn 5 The quotes in question literally read: "The spirit of modern life ... is most clearly marked by the fact that the sovereignty of God is denied, and man yields himself to the mystical current of an endless process, a regressus and progressus in infinitum." En een pagina verder: "... the maxim of the right of the stronger, arising from Darwinism itself, has found almost universal acceptance. And the end can only be, that once more the sound principles of democracy will be banished, to make room... for the course and overbearing kratistocracy of brutal money power."

³³ BCW Note: In this exaugural address Goudzwaard is formulating a warning that is strongly in line with a former valedictorian of the Vrije Universiteit J P van Rooyen Professor of Actuarial Statistics who, in 1971, presented his lecture "Demografische perspectieven". Goudzwaard had referred to this in 1972 in his inaugural lecture at the Vrije Universiteit. Van Rooyen had observed: "*We were under the innocent illusion that we could do everything with impunity that, in our opinion, could serve the well-being of people and now we experience that limits have been set for our actions that urge moderation. It is understandable that the personal suffering caused by the stench, noise and pollution becomes paramount, but the systematic destruction of nature and its fundamental balance is in fact an even more serious evil. Anyone who listens to biologists, geologists and climatologists knows very well that people are filled with great concern, and it is an almost shocking experience that in many respects we are still completely or largely ignorant of the nature of the dangers, which we ourselves may have called up.*"

³⁴ BCW Note: Fr. "coming from without/outside"

³⁵ BCW Note: These three beacons will be further developed in his work with Mark Vander Vennen and David van Heemst **Hope in Troubled Times: a new vision for confronting global crises** Baker 2007: The Periscope Guideline (pp.181-184); The Minsweeper Guideline (pp.185-187); The Rope Ladder Guideline (pp.187-189).

positively interrelated and optimally mutually beneficial. Ir. Th. Potma once developed his so-called “forgotten scenario”, in which environmental concerns and increased employment went hand in hand (Potma, 1979). But the principle has broader applicability than this example suggests. As I mentioned, the continued debt crisis in the global South has already caused the loss of millions of jobs in the North. But then the reverse path is also, in principle, feasible. A clear and targeted debt cancellation for the poorest countries has broader economic significance than simply combating poverty there. It also might imply a slight reduction in destabilizing migration flows and therefore the return of meaningful employment opportunities in the North.

[21] It is no coincidence, incidentally, that terms like “taking steps”, “embarking on a path” are in use here. Ascending spirals always begin with some form of willingness to prioritize what stands still, what limps along, or lags behind. And that, in turn, presupposes a willingness to do what is appropriate in terms of public morality or public justice. An economic policy that places only faith in its own self-chosen goals and instruments is apparently a dead end (Buber, 1959: 65).³⁶ One of the honorary doctors of the Vrije Universiteit, Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker,³⁷ once demonstrated the wisdom of such path-orientation in a wonderful article (Von Weizsäcker, 1975: 111). In a path-oriented policy, the path widens as you go: each initial step adds the information you need to take further steps.³⁸

2. The second beacon is based on the fact that dynamic flows require both fixed channels and limiting banks. What is priced only has value based on the value of an unpriced reality. This not only leads to a plea for continued adherence to environmental preconditions in economic policy, but is also strikingly relevant in light of the unbridled financial dynamism of our time. Economists and politicians sometimes seem to think that financial flows can continue to expand as long as the growth of financial reserves is linked to it. However, the opposite is true. The financial world also needs a foundation in the world outside itself, if it is not to embark on an Icarus flight and crash to the ground. It is therefore high time that the global monetary system be re-anchored in the world of normative economic realities. And here I’m thinking not only of the reality of the world’s remaining raw materials, environmental capacity, and energy reserves, but also of the many unfulfilled economic needs of poor countries, which compel them to produce sufficient food, clothing, housing, and

³⁶ BG ftn 6 Vgl. de volgende uitspraak van Martin Buber in *Ik en Gij*: “...de ongelovige kern van de willekeurige mens kan niets anders waarnemen dan ongeloof en willekeur, een doel-stellen en middelen-verzinnen (...) een wereld die tot doel en middel gemaakt is, dat is zijn wereld.” En: “De vrije mens echter (...) heeft alleen het ene: (.) zijn besluit om naar zijn bestemming op weg te gaan.” Cf. the following statement by Martin Buber in *I and Thou*: “... the unbelieving core of the arbitrary man can perceive nothing but disbelief and arbitrariness, a setting of ends and inventing of means (...) a world that is turned into ends and means, that is his world.” And: “The free man, however (...) has only one thing: (.) his decision to set out for his destination.”

³⁷ BCW Note: The views of Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker in relation to the international economic order are critically reviewed by Goudzwaard and Johan van Baars in “Norms for the International Economic Order” in **Justice in the International Economic Order**, Proceedings of the Second International Conference of Reformed Institutions for Christian Higher Education, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, 13-19 August 1978 pp. 223-253.

³⁸ BCW Note: This discussion from within the Vrije Universiteit also consider the creation law-order, confessed by the Psalmist in Psalm 119:96 “Of everything completed I have seen a limit; and Your commandments are exceedingly broad.”

education. What a blessing it would be for the entire world if the creation and expenditure of global money were to be oriented toward these economic realities! It would mean the end of the tyranny of the growth and dynamism of speculative global capital, to which virtually all nations of this world bow deeply as if it were a new “big brother”. Throughout history, money has always needed to be anchored in external economic reserves and standards, precisely because it possesses the capacity to suggest the infinite in a finite world. An [22] economy without financial anchoring may appear autonomous, but in fact, it always becomes a slave to the monetary dynamics it evokes.

3. The third and final beacon concerns the refuting of paradoxes and therefore has a paradox at its core. It is the great economic significance of forbearance and of free economic action.³⁹ Both, forbearance and free action, represent a deviation from the self-evident pattern of demands of a dynamic society. And thus, even within the most rigorous dynamics, space can be carved out for an escape route. Weinreb once said of the Hebrew word “*bechinom*”, “given freely”, that only that word and the corresponding action save the world (Weinreb, 1974: 45, 83, 191).⁴⁰ And indeed, it seems to have an economic counterpart. For any form of restraint regarding maximizing, for example of one’s own income claims, in principle creates an economic space in a dynamic universe. It creates degrees of freedom to effectively address that which either lags behind in productivity, has no price in itself, or has a low market value: attention to the “objects of care”, which do not coincide with the “objects of use”.⁴¹

At first glance, this talk of renouncing claims or even an open-handed offer seems a sign of weakness *par excellence*. But I firmly believe it is the strongest possible foundation for achieving the now-necessary economic transformation of our society. Difficulties like these can only be avoided when the concept of growth and development itself changes. We must move away from the childish and greedy concept of maximum expansion and toward the mature concept of abundance based on saturation and sustainability.

Paradoxes like those of the erosion of healthcare, recurring poverty, and rising unemployment only shrink when, like parasites, they lose their breeding ground. And their breeding ground is the raging outflow of ever-increasing income and consumption, which in turn necessitates a maximum increase in production and productivity. It is this closed loop, or devil’s circle, that erodes healthcare, including government care, by driving it to ever-higher costs; that deepens poverty by creating ever-increasing disadvantaged situations; that eliminates meaningful human labour by

³⁹ BCW Note: This is a crucial sentence: *Het is de grote economische betekenis van het nalaten en van het economisch handelen om niet*. The terms “*nalaten*” and “*handelen om niet*” beg for further explication.

⁴⁰ BG ftn 7 “Het doen om niet is beslissend, omdat het Goddelijk is...” “En daar speelt zich ook de beslissing af: wordt dat wat wij ontmoeten teruggebracht tot de oorsprong, ... doen wij het om niet, of lat men zich meenemen met de stroom, genietende van de roes van de ontwikkeling, genietende van het zichzelf tot godheid proclameren.”
“Doing nothing is decisive, because it is Divine...” “In this will a decision be played out: will what we encounter be brought back to its origin, ... will we do nothing, or will we let ourselves be carried away by the intoxication of development, enjoying the act of proclaiming ourselves as deity?”

⁴¹ BG ftn 8 Een nadere beschouwing over dit in de economie verwaarloosde onderscheid is te vinden in: Goudzwaard/de Lange, 1991: 51 e.v.).

making it increasingly expensive. To reduce the burden of the demands now increasingly placed on people, time, and the environment, the principle of “give-and-take”⁴² will have to yield to the economy of restraint and the economy of gratuitous action at certain [23] decisive economic points. This should begin by refraining from further increases in average disposable income and per capita consumption, as illustrated in the accompanying illustration clearly shows.⁴³

But will such a sustainable scenario ever come to fruition? I think it requires broad societal consultation among all the key economic and political actors. In this process, in Van Zuthem’s words, they will primarily have to consider how to fill the responsibilities that have remained vacant thus far (Van Zuthem, 1992: 30).

But here too, hope can flourish.⁴⁴ For approaching adversities can move people and actors to new forms of solidarity, as our national economic history has repeatedly demonstrated. If only people are willing to choose life together. And that is something different, something deeper than choosing survival. It is about the continued existence of the next generations that Bonhoeffer spoke of. This form of continued existence is built on respect for what has been given to us freely and it includes care for everything entrusted to our care. In other words, it presupposes a path and a meaning that cannot simply be designed by ourselves. And that, right down to the heart of economic policy, makes us humble before the Lord of life, even to the point of timidity: *“Lord, to whom shall we go? For you have the words of eternal life.”*

⁴² BCW note: the principle of “I give in order that you may give”, the principle of give and take, may need to be foregone.

⁴³ BG ftn 9 This illustration is taken from a publication by Friends of the Earth. The diagram shows three scenarios, each indicating a specific pattern of growth and corresponding energy consumption and environmental impact. Both the ‘business as usual’ scenario and the so-called sustainable development scenario, in which the West focuses more on sustainability as growth increases, appear to fail globally; they do not bring the global economy within the dotted line of sustainability. There is only one scenario, one route, that does achieve this: the scenario of sustainable consumption. Only based on a maximum, consistent level of consumption can the West achieve decreasing energy consumption and reduced environmental impact.

⁴⁴ BCW Note: Goudzwaard had struck this hopeful note in these words: “... there is hope for the future, in very practical terms. Hope cannot be derived from our own detailed blueprints for a relatively distant future. Real hope is not produced as a product but rather given through a kind of birth. It comes not primarily from us but much more to us. The sole condition is that our societies and communities consistently follow, step-by- step, a Way—a way which is guided by principles of care for the weak, and which, from the outset, contains elements of joy and relaxation. Stepping forward by stepping back (the Hebrew word for this is *bechinom*, “giving up”) is the unavoidable first step in the essential transformation of our own rich economies into truly sustainable economies.” “The Gospel and Global Climate Change” in **Paths to Hope in Troubled Times** 2007. This was the conference thaat launched **Hope in Troubled Times** October 13, 2007. <https://tukampendatastore.blob.core.windows.net/neocalvinism/allofliferedeemed/Goudzwaard/BG111.pdf> p.26

Outline of the sustainable consumption scenario

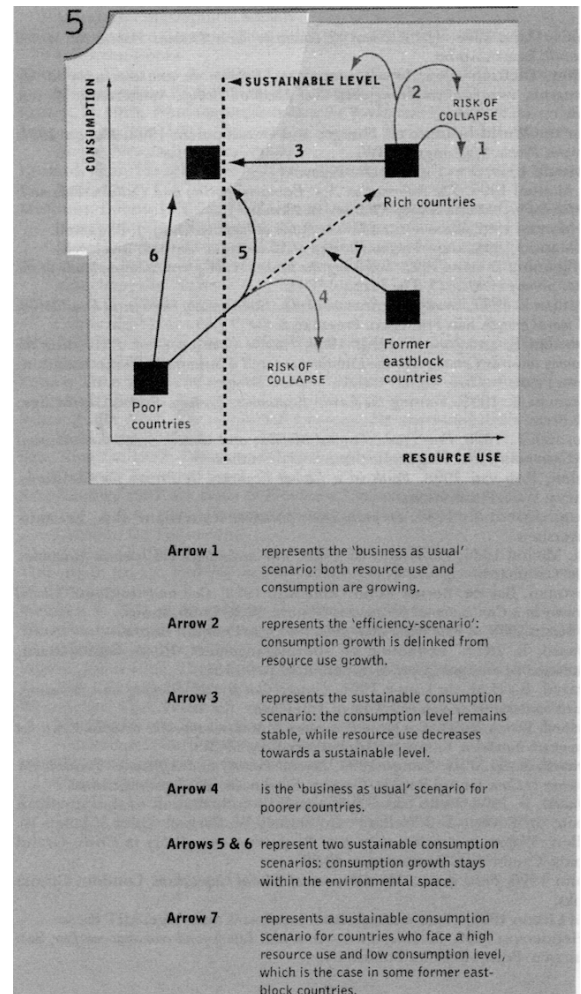
A sustainable consumption scenario looks considerably different to a traditional consumption policy. The traditional policy, such as we know it from the last few decades, is characterised by a relationship between an increase in the consumption of natural resources and a growth in prosperity. Incidentally, this policy has been very successful, especially in the rich industrialized countries, not in the least due to the environmental policy that has been pursued. This is in sharp contrast to the situation in the former Eastern bloc countries, where an increase in the consumption of natural resources did result in considerably more environmental problems but not in increased prosperity. The traditional growth model in the Southern countries is based on the desire to reproduce a similar Western development model, whereby poverty can be combatted. No doubt it is possible for the billion people living in the rich industrialized countries to continue to follow such a development model for some time to come. However, this would seem impossible if more than five billion people followed the same development model, or more than ten billion people, if we think in terms of the prognoses on world population growth. Catastrophes would seem inevitable.

Efficiency scenario

Therefore, an efficiency policy is being sought instead of a traditional growth policy: consumption growth would no longer occur on the basis of using more natural resources, but on the basis of a more efficient use of natural resources. This way of thinking is becoming increasingly popular with policy makers in the rich industrialized countries. For the one billion people living in the rich countries. This type of scenario is of course distinctly more sustainable than the traditional growth model. However, a scenario such as this is ultimately only sustainable if the more than four billion people living in the Southern countries do not aspire to using the same amount of natural resources. And it is definitely not sustainable if it applies to the ten million people in the twenty-first century.

Sustainable consumption scenario

What remains then is the sustainable consumption scenario. This is based on maintaining a level of prosperity in the rich industrialized countries, with a simultaneous reduction in the consumption of natural resources to a level within the environmental space. The advantage of a scenario such as this, is that it is reproducible. The Southern countries can develop towards the same level of natural resource use, either directly or indirectly, whereby temporarily, due to a developmental disadvantage, the environmental space will be exceeded. The advantage of a sustainable consumption scenario is that the risk of catastrophes is avoided, so that in the long term, a relatively high level of consumption can be guaranteed.



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