

Politics of Being
Wisdom and Science for a New Development Paradigm

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Book Review: Prof. Dr. Dr h.c. mult Christoph Stückelberger, Geneva/Switzerland

“We need to move from having to being, which many believe means interbeing.” (p.55) This is the core call of the author, Thomas Legrand, a French economist, environmental scientist and close to the Buddhist worldview. A cultural fundamental change, a paradigm shift, is needed for a sustainable world. He does not deny material needs. “Having is a material condition to being. It is a means, not an end.” (56) Therefore, the new development paradigm needs to be essentially spiritual, with the inner dimension at its center and goal. Values and self-expression should come before accumulation of further material goods.

This is not the perspective of an esoteric spiritualist in a hermitage. It is the insight of an expert on development for UN-agencies, private sector companies and non-governmental organisations. An agent for the UN Sustainable Development Goals. This makes this book credible and very important. In the main part of the book, he unfolds seven “Spiritual Values as the Foundation of the Politics of Being” (chapter II, 73-181): Understanding, Life, Happiness, Love, Peace, Mindfulness and Light. The second half of the book then focusses on implementation of these values in an “Agenda for Action” by nine sectors: Family, Education, Work, Health, Food/agriculture, Nature, Justice, Economy and Governance. The focus is more on personal and interpersonal action, but necessarily leads to the “Politics of Being in Practice” in Chapter III. It looks at the role of nations without being nationalistic and the role of “being leaders” with “spiritual intelligence”.

The important book is a comprehensive global vision, but also a practical policy-guide for the transition from a world of having to a world of being. The UN Sustainable Development Goals SDG’s, for which the author is engaged, are then approached from a different angle, giving the spiritual, emotional, values-based development more weight and putting it even

at the first place. Thomas Legrand combines and reconciles “Wisdom and Science” as the subtitle of the book expresses. Inner wisdom has to be and can be combined with modern science, but science and economy without wisdom remains mainly quantitative and “more of the same” than providing a real shift.

I was surprised when the author, whom I did not know, sent me the book for a comment and book review. May be because we share many perspectives and his book has similarities with my book “Globalance. Ethics Handbook for a World Post-Covid” (Geneva 2020, free download: www.globethics.net/globalance and in print for sale). Both books call for a global, values-driven, balanced new development perspective. Legrand unfolds the Buddhist wisdom, influenced by his neighbor in France, the Vietnamese Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh. The strength of his book is the focus on his spiritual values, which he unfolds to all sector of society. The limitation is, that the dialogue with other value-systems is missing in this book (Thich Nhat Hanh is engaged in Buddhist-Christian encounters). Myself, I write as a protestant-ecumenical Christian Ethicist, specialized on global ethics. I try to integrate in my own background the common basis of other value systems, especially from the world religions. The people and nations, the cultures and religions need strong cooperation for the survival of people and planet. We bring our respective values into this cooperation. We humans have so much in common as “global ethics” can show. The spiritual dimension, unfolded in this book, shows, that the SDG’s and the important call for “impact measurement” cannot be reached without putting more emphasis on this inner dimension. At the same time, the spiritual and material reality are for the author and in Christian perspective not opposite, but should be inseparably united. The quality of the inner guidance cannot be measured by the same quantitative impact indicators. Even the international attempt of measuring happiness does not really reach the depth of the dimensions in this book.

I warmly recommend this book as a careful, insightful guide for a paradigm shift in development. I offer a dialogue in order to enrich each other with Buddhist and Christian, Islamic and Sufi, Hindu and Jewish perspectives in order to find the balance of Wisdom and Science as well as the material and spiritual needs for the common future.

Geneva/Switzerland, 1 January 2022. My contact: stueckelberger@president.foundation .