



# **Eudaimonistic Buddhism: Can Metta Transform and Redirect Our Societies and Save Our Environment?**

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## **Abstract**

This ideology of infinite competition, infinite growth and infinite consumption that our culture has been exposed to for over half a century denies one of our most fundamental characteristics: our ability and desire to cooperate. We are exposed to more temptations leading to addictions in our society than ever before. Consumerism stimulates us to shop, to eat, to click on our smartphones day and night. Could it be that social disconnection is the main drive for our consumerist economy; the main drive that keeps the greed and competition in Wall Street steaming ahead to destruction? This ideology of infinite competition, infinite growth and infinite consumption that our culture has been exposed to for over half a century denies one of our most fundamental characteristics: our ability and desire to cooperate. When we put human flourishing instead of unlimited growth at the heart of our economy; when we put friendly environments at the heart of our politics; in other words when we make it clear in all our economic and political actions that we will leave no one behind; we can cure humanity of its addictions, redirect our economy and politics, and save our one and only planet. This paper looks to explore how Buddhism can contribute to human development, using a comparative study of Eudaimonistic politics and economics to create and protect an open benevolent society by eradicating the three addictive poisons that are at the heart of Buddhist spirituality.

*Keywords:* Eudaimonistic Buddhism, Metta, Environment, Buddhist Spirituality.

## **Eudaimonia: human flourishing as the ultimate goal of human development**

Before we ask ourselves how Buddhism could contribute to human development, we first need to define what our vision of human development would look like if all of its parameters were fulfilled. We live in a time when everything is ruled by statistics. We love numbers. Yet, at the same time, we generally acknowledge that the most important things in life cannot be captured by a statistical or logical analysis. We've essentially banned the considerations that matter to us most to private life. In the organisation of the state and its economy, key elements of human development like happiness and fulfilment, are considered sentimental as though they would distract us from the important things. But would they?

Aristotle called the ultimate human development "eudaimonia," which can be defined as human flourishing. To Aristotle, eudaimonia was the ultimate goal guiding all ethics and politics. But Aristotle also said "no one would want to live without friends," and "friendship unites the state" (Nicomachean Ethics, 8.1). In other words, there is no human flourishing without friendship.

In Buddhism, the ultimate human development is "*a society that supports and strengthens the development of our humanness. This [social] Buddhism does not view personal enlightenment as something that could be obtained separately from society. It is not indifferent to society.*"<sup>1</sup> The Buddha did also put friendship at the centre of his spirituality. In fact, he called friendship nothing less than "the whole of the holy life." (Upaddha Sutta, SN 45.2)

Although there obviously are great differences between Aristotle and the Buddha - not at least in the virtues they focused on - they both considered human flourishing and friendship as central to their views of the ultimate human development. What could Buddhism add to the concept of eudaimonia? In other words, what would an Eudaimonistic Buddhism look like?

Aristotle was obviously not a Buddhist, so there will be different views on how to achieve eudaimonia. One of the main divergences between Western and Buddhist philosophy is their distinct views on the relationship between rationality and connectivity. Western

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<sup>1</sup>Han F. de Wit, *The Power of Buddhanature in Society*, talk at the European Buddhist Union conference 'Bringing wisdom and compassion to European societies' (March 2018)

philosophy always considered rationality to be prior to all other things, whereas Buddhist philosophy always emphasized the need for balance between rationality and connectivity, between wisdom (prajna) and compassion (karuna). Or as HH the Dalai Lama says, “our intelligence needs to be guided by warm-heartedness.”

## **An economic ideology of competition and disconnection created a sick society**

Western philosophical, political and economic thought have largely ignored Aristotle’s emphasis on friendship. Emotions and relations were too unpredictable in the search for universal theories, laws and solid policies. And actually, science and capitalism have been very successful with this method. Some 150 years ago, pioneering Western economists were very impressed with Newton’s success in the realm of physics. Their ambition was to copy his accomplishments, and look for universal economic laws that were as compulsory as Newton’s three laws of motion. Economy had to be disconnected from society and was approached as an independent realm with its own universal laws. And the politics to organise that society were already the exclusive domain of male rationality. Women, emotions and friendships were considered to be important but also unpredictable, and therefore not fit to play a role in taking up political responsibility and planning. They belonged to the private life and the household.

Warm-heartedness was definitely not a concern of the neoliberal ideology of the last century. It “*defines us as competitors, guided above all other impulses by the urge to get ahead of our fellows.*”<sup>2</sup> To disconnect economy from society was from the start doomed to fail, as we now know that the behaviors of people and finance follow quite different laws than those of physics, and they are not as predictable as gravity. “*Thanks to more and better data, it has become clear that such economic laws of motion simply don’t exist. Far from being a necessary phase of development, extreme inequality and environmental degradation are the result of policy choices, and these choices can be changed.*”<sup>3</sup> Due to the neoliberal ideology - with at its core the denial that that there is anything else possible but their choices (TINA) - we are exhausting and polluting the only biosphere we have to live in and social inequalities are rising higher than ever before.

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<sup>2</sup>George Monbiot, *Out of the Wreckage: A New Politics for an Age of Crisis*, Verso, 2017

<sup>3</sup>Kate Raworth, *Old economics is based on false ‘laws of physics’ – new economics can save us*, The Guardian, 6 April 2017

This ideology of infinite competition, infinite growth and infinite consumption that our culture has been exposed to for over half a century denies one of our most fundamental characteristics: our ability and desire to cooperate. Mammals are very social beings. Approaching everyone as competitors or potential obstacles rather than companions and potential friends has created a fragmented, disconnected society. It is therefore not surprising that the most wealthy and technologically advanced societies seem to suffer ever increasing levels of mental illnesses and drug addiction. In recent years, the wealthy West has been hit by an increase in numbers of eating disorders, physical self-harm, anxiety and depression to levels never registered before. In the UK for example, there was a 35% rise in adults reporting severe symptoms of common mental disorders in about 20 years,<sup>4</sup> and the number of people diagnosed with eating disorders has increased by 15 per cent in just over a decade.<sup>5</sup> In 2015, the NHS Adult Psychiatric Morbidity survey showed that over a seven year period, self-harm among young people in the UK between 16 and 24 doubled in men and tripled in women.<sup>6</sup> This means that one in four women of this age group have harmed themselves! Social isolation is believed to be at the heart of this evolution.

### 3. Is the Economic Man rational or addicted?

Kate Raworth from Oxford University says the main reason our society is in such a mess is the behaviour of what she calls the Rational Economic Man: “*The character at the heart of 20th century economics—‘rational economic man’—presents a pitiful portrait of humanity: he stands alone, with money in his hand, a calculator in his head, ego in his heart, and nature at his feet.*” In other words the Rational Economic Man is socially isolated, but considers his life successful. He is a winner - and thus others are losers - in the world of infinite competition, and nature is an unlimited resource for his desire for infinite consumption. He is wealthy but he wants more, and he is indifferent to the impact of his behavior on others and the environment.

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<sup>4</sup>*between 1993 and 2014 (Mental illness soars among young women in England – survey, The Guardian, 29 Sep 2016)*

<sup>5</sup>*between 2000 and 2013 (<https://www.kcl.ac.uk/ioppn/news/records/2013/May/Eating-disorders-increase.aspx>)*

<sup>6</sup>*between 2007 and 2014 (Mental illness soars among young women in England – survey, The Guardian, 29 Sep 2016)*

My question is: Is the Economic Man indeed acting so rationally? Within his financial bubble his actions probably all make sense within the rationality of neoliberal ideology. But when we zoom out, he looks more like someone suffering from Gold Fever who obsessively, feverishly digs for more gold to the point that he neglects his relations and his future. He's like a junky, but in this case not addicted to drugs but to greed.

Raworth advocates a change from a Rational Economic Man to a Social Adaptable Human. Given all the evidence of what 20th century economics have done to us, that sounds like a very reasonable demand. But if Economic Man is an addict, will our rational initiatives to redirect our economy in order to save our societies and our planet really change his behaviour? Maybe, but probably to a limited degree. He may be convinced and try very hard, he might even adjust his behaviour because he is scared of punishment by the law, or he may be receptive to moral appeals. But such adjustments are due to rational reasoning. They mostly don't change the behaviour of an addict. To heal this behaviour, we can learn something from both modern science and Buddhist Spirituality.

## **Science and addiction: the discovery of social disconnection as a major source**

If the Economic Man is an addict, how could we treat him? We know how very hard our societies are struggling with addictions, especially drug addictions, and with not much success. HH the Dalai Lama once expressed his astonishment about the way the West is dealing with drug addicts. Extreme amounts of money are spent on making it impossible to get controlled substances, on destroying the fields where drugs are grown and labs where they are made, on arresting networks of dealers, on individual recovery for addicts, on putting both users and dealers in jail ... But no one seems to ask the question: why are people so desperate to use drugs? And how can we train them not to go for drugs in the first place?

In the 70s, Professor Bruce Alexander from Vancouver University performed a fascinating experiment. Till then - and still in most of our policies - addiction was approached as a pure chemical thing. We get hooked to certain drugs in our brain and can't do without them any longer, even to the point that it kills us. This theory is based on earlier experiments with rats. When a rat in a cage is given the choice between clear water or water with heroin, after a while all rats go for the heroin and if we wait long enough, all of them will overdose. The conclusion was clear: the rats became so physically addicted

to heroin that an overdose was inevitable. But Prof. Alexander noticed something in this experiment that was not taken into account. Just like mammals, rats are very social beings and all these rats were locked up alone in a cage, isolated from other rats. He created the Rat Park Experiment. You could call it a rat eudaimonia: enough space, enough food, and above all: lots of company. And of course the experiment: the choice between clear water and water with heroin. The results were astonishing: the heroin water wasn't popular at all and there were no overdoses. From 100% overdose to 0% overdose. Alexander's conclusion was clear: loneliness and despair, not chemical addiction, made the rats overdose.

Alexander's conclusions meant that the Dalai Lama was right and that our political approach to drug addiction is completely wrong. Punishing people - increasing their isolation by putting them in jail and socially stigmatising them - will only make things worse. In the year 2000, 1% (sic) of the Portuguese population was addicted to heroin. Realising this was untenable, Portugal took a radical step and decriminalised all drugs. It redirected the massive amounts of money that were spent on trying to cut people off getting drugs, to reconnecting them with society. *"It'll be 15 years this year [2015] since that experiment began, and the results are in: injecting drug use is down in Portugal, according to the British Journal of Criminology, by 50 percent, five-zero percent. Overdose is massively down, HIV is massively down among addicts. Addiction in every study is significantly down."*<sup>7</sup> The Portuguese experiment combatting the social disconnection of drug addicts is pretty much the only successful policy so far.

We are exposed to more temptations leading to addictions in our society than ever before. Consumerism stimulates us to shop, to eat, to click on our smartphones day and night. Could it be that social disconnection is the main drive for our consumerist economy; the main drive that keeps the greed and competition in Wall Street steaming ahead to destruction? *"If you have a crisis in your life, you'll notice something. It won't be your Twitter followers who come to sit with you. It won't be your Facebook friends who help you turn it round. It'll be your flesh and blood friends who you have deep and nuanced and textured, face-to-face relationships with... Bruce Alexander, the guy who did the Rat Park experiment, says, we talk all the time in addiction about individual recovery, and it's right to talk about that, but we need to talk much more about social recovery. Something's gone wrong with us, not just with individuals but as a group, and we've created a society*

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<sup>7</sup>*Johann Hari, Everything you think you know about addiction is wrong, TED Talk July 12, 2015*

*where, for a lot of us, life looks a whole lot more like that isolated cage and a whole lot less like Rat Park.*<sup>8</sup>

The enslavement of our thoughts to thinking in terms of growth, GDP and consumption are so deep rooted that most arguments about the economy will still stand or fall depending whether it is good or bad for growth. We became addicted to growth, but as the American writer Edward Abbey already warned in 1977: “*Growth for the sake of growth is the ideology of a cancer cell.*”<sup>9</sup>

## **Towards a new paradigm: doughnut economics**

We clearly need to develop a new paradigm. We need an economy that makes us flourish, whether or not it grows; not an economy that grows, whether or not it makes us flourish. If the economy doesn't make us flourish, there is something rotten in the state of our economy.

Already in 1990, the UN presented its first human development report - “*a new approach for advancing human flourishing*” - in search for better ways to manage the economy towards a more holistic view on human development. The goal was to dethrone GDP/economic growth as an end in itself and the leading indicator of economic progress. Participants were looking for new economic models that would serve the richness of human life, rather than simply the richness of the economy; economic models that would take human rights and the limited resources of our planet into account as well as fair opportunities and choices for all people. Since then several new initiatives have been undertaken to find better alternatives to GDP, such as the Bhutan Gross National Happiness. Last year, Kate Raworth launched a new economic model to combine all existing initiatives and set a new goal for the economy. She named it Doughnut Economics.<sup>10</sup> It follows two principles: make the economy regenerative and distributive by design.

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<sup>8</sup>*Johann Hari, Everything you think you know about addiction is wrong, TED Talk July 12, 2015*

<sup>9</sup>*Edward Abbey, The Journey Home: Some Words in the Defense of the American West, Dutton, New York, 1977*

<sup>10</sup>*Kate Raworth, Doughnut Economics: Seven Ways to Think Like a 21st-Century Economist, Cornerstone, 2017*

The Doughnut model describes a sphere where a safe and just space for humanity is possible. It is limited by two red lines that should not be crossed (but too often are), an inner circle and an outer circle.

The outer circle is the ecological boundary economic models need to take into account. It contains parameters such as the impact on climate change, the impact on biodiversity, on various types of pollution, on freshwater withdrawals. A regenerative economy will respect such red lines. An economic model that overshoots on these is a threat to our space for humanity.

The inner circle reflects the social impact of our economic models. What is the impact on jobs, decent incomes and housing; on access to education and healthcare; to food, water and energy? A flourishing humanity is a humanity of justice and non-discrimination. What's the impact of our economy on peace, human rights and the rule of law, and equality across races, genders and sexualities? A distributive economy will strengthen the social foundations, while an economy that fails to do so risks the implosion of a society resulting in violence and war.

Raworth's Doughnut Economy brings together a wide range of different goals and initiatives into a simple and powerful unifying model. It is very useful not to lose track of the main goal of the economy in particular and human development in general.

The Doughnut Economy includes some grey areas where Buddhism could make a valuable contribution. First we need to specify the goal: the space between the red circles. Raworth calls this space "the safe and just space for humanity." But this does not define the quality of life within it. Referring to Aristotle and ecology, we could call it the *eudaimonistic biosphere*, a precious and limited environment in which we can survive and in which we want to achieve human flourishing. This is broader than just ecological safety and legal justice. As a biosphere, it emphasises the crucial limitations Raworth refers to. Crossing those lines would result in self-destruction, either by turning our environment into an uninhabitable desert, or by weakening social cohesion till it implodes and results in war. But *eudaimonia* - human flourishing - puts more emphasis on what we want to achieve within that biosphere, and we know from both Aristotle and the Buddha that friendship plays a crucial role in achieving this. We further learned from the mistakes of the West and from Buddhist spirituality that this *eudaimonia* should be guided by warm-heartedness, not just rationality. We need to bring wisdom and compassion into our societies.

Second: Raworth convincingly describes the economic origins of what went wrong with our economy, but she does not give a remedy on how to change our behaviour that put us there in the first place. She does mention that we should change from a Rational Economic Men into a Social Adaptable Humans. This is undoubtedly true. But how can we achieve this? Will we, once we have secured the ecological and social borders, once we have managed to create a regenerative and redistributive economy, also have changed our behavior? This seems highly unlikely if we do not understand and redirect the patterns of our behavior that have brought our planet to the edge of destruction in the first place.

## **The three addictive poisons in Buddhism**

To Buddhism, the increase in drug use and mental illnesses might not be an accidental side effect but the tip of the ice berg. If everyone would act like selfish but primarily rational beings, like Hobbes taught, then some sort of social contract would indeed follow out of the social war from everyone against everyone, vying for limited resources. But as we have seen, the state of our economy and the state of our social interactions - symbolised perhaps best at the moment by Wall Street and Facebook - all show symptoms of addictive behaviour.

Buddhist spirituality teaches that we are all continuously exposed to what is known as the three poisons (in Mahayana) or the three unwholesome roots (in Theravada). We could also call them the three addictive poisons. They can be translated as ignorance/indifference (not (wanting to) understand the way of things), attachment/craving (the desire to possess everything we like and (we think) will make us happy) and aggression/hatred (the desire to push away or destroy everything we don't like or (we think) might pose a threat to us). When we are under their influence, we disconnect and create mental bubbles based on illusory constructs to distinguish us from others, such as race, social status or income. In short, we create the illusion of an independent fixed self, and look for reasons to be more important than others, as being rich, or being a man, or being straight or being white. We are in Buddhist terminology subject to the delusional fevers of samsara, of endlessly turning in circles. Like the man with gold fever. We keep digging, we keep looking for more, we become afraid and irritated of others and the outside world.

Could it be that 20th century economics cultivated these poisons like never before? Greed, aggression and indifference not only poison our mind but also lie behind consumerism, racism, gender inequality, the exploitation of workers, discrimination against minorities and

pollution. They influence the way we organise our societies, from the very local community up to world politics. If our oceans are polluted, it starts with polluting our local park. If laws make discrimination structural, it starts with how we treat our neighbours. The financial crisis revealed how organised greed has injected this poison in the heart of our societies. Actions conducted under the influence of the three addictive poisons result in the creation of hostile environments. If we aim to create a benevolent eudaimonistic society, we will need to treat those addictive patterns.

Where do these three poisons come from? Just as for drug addictions and some mental illnesses: “[they originate] from a sense of separation. The more connected, the more intimate we are with others, the less inclined we will be to try to take advantage of other people, or attack others with our aggression or to treat them with indifference... Separation, segregation, distance makes unknown. And unknown makes unloved. When the three poisons are the driving forces, the ultimately destroy every form of culture, organisation and society at every level.”<sup>11</sup>

If their source is the same, could their treatment also be the same? Might Aristotle and the Buddha be right after all, and do we need to put friendship and friendliness back at the heart of our politics to redirect our economy and save our one and only planet? Is the ultimate cure for our society and our planet to leave no one behind? To fight social isolation and reconnect people?

## To cure the heart of our society: cultivating metta and karuna

Eradicating the three addictive poisons is at the heart of Buddhist spirituality. Their main antidotes are known as the brahma-viharas or Buddhist cardinal virtues. The most important of these are metta/maitri (often translated as loving kindness, but more precisely as boundless friendliness) and karuna (compassion or more precisely compassionate action). Where the three addictive poisons create hostile environments, metta and karuna are virtues that create friendly environments in which positive relations and friendship can flourish. There are of course many other important Buddhist principles that are relevant in this context (such as non-violence, non-discrimination, interdependence), but Buddhism has always put metta and karuna at the core of its spirituality.

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<sup>11</sup> Han F. de Wit, *The Power of Buddhanature in Society*, talk at the European Buddhist Union conference ‘Bringing wisdom and compassion to European societies’ (March 2018)

Cultivating these virtues leads to genuine happiness (sukkha, as opposed to the short-term good feeling from consuming something). And genuine happiness is not good for a consumerist economy. In the consumerist economy, you aim to leave everyone behind in order to make sure you achieve what you want. And you always need to want more, for why would we buy more if you feel satisfied with what you already possess? A consumerist economy must constantly make you feel bad, make you feel like you are missing something, make you feel like you need some physical corrections or a bigger house or the newest clothes. These trends increase with every new impact of more technical control and consumer driven social media we are exposed to.

In an eudaimonist economy on the other hand, you leave no one behind, as you would never leave a friend behind. Relations follow different laws than pure materialist rationality. In materialist logic, if you give something (or if someone else got it before you), you lost it. In relationships, if you give something, you win something. In hostile environments such as the consumerist economy, others are potential rivals and obstacles. In friendly environments, others are potential friends and companions.

If we want to cure our society of the social presentations of the three poisons, we'll need to give individuals the tools to address them. Education has an important task here. Children stand to benefit from what science has uncovered so far, about how we are exposed to various addictions, how to recognise them and what we can do to neutralise them—as well as the important role of friendship in leading a full life.

Secular forms of Buddhist practices such as mindfulness can play an important role. For example, Zen priest Dario Girolami has been guiding prisoners in Rome in the practice of meditation for many years now. *“Most people who have completed a course of meditation report a perceptible and lasting reduction in stress and other physical and psychological symptoms; they also report an increased ability to relax, greater ability to interact with others in stressful situations of short or long duration, increased energy and desire to live, higher self-esteem, and a reduction in levels of pain.”*<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Dario Doshin Girolami, *To Cure the Heart*, talk at the European Buddhist Union conference ‘Bringing wisdom and compassion to European societies’ (March 2018)

## **Eudaimonistic politics: creating and protecting an open benevolent society**

Governments of course cannot force people to connect or to be friends. That would be a bad idea, for a society that is fully managed from above tends to lose its humanity. Figures and targets become more important than faces and people. Creating friendly environments in which humanity can flourish will always be a grassroots project.

The development of high-quality connections between people is a face-to-face process. But political power can water the grass or burn it. Political decisions are never neutral. Every step can contribute to a more hostile or to a more friendly environment. And as Hannah Arendt warned us: it all starts with small, daily things that we might not even notice in the beginning. In other words, even daily local politics can lead towards open or closed societies. Creating friendly environments is thus not just some small talk about making friends. It has important political implications. Attention for daily politics does not mean metta and karuna cannot play a role in greater political schemes of course, and Buddhism has a long tradition of encouraging not only personal but also social transformation. When after a bloody battle (264 BCE) emperor Ashoka realised how his life was drained in structural greed and aggression, he drastically changed the politics within his realm. He started hospitals (including for animals), made sure women had access to education, created public gardens and planted trees, ... Nagarjuna (2nd century CE) advised the South Indian king Udayi *“to care for every being in his kingdom: by building schools everywhere and endowing honest, kind, and brilliant teachers; by providing for all his subjects’ needs, opening free restaurants and inns for travellers; by tempering justice with mercy, sending barbers, doctors, and teachers to the prisons to serve the inmates; by thinking of each prisoner as his own wayward child, to be corrected in order to return to free society and use his or her precious human life to attain enlightenment.”*<sup>13</sup>

Many Buddhist organisations try to contribute to social transformation towards more open and friendly environments at various levels in their society. As a continental organisation, the European Buddhist Union has for example been active in the domain of human rights. In 2008 the EBU obtained official participatory status with the Conference

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<sup>13</sup> Robert Thurman, *Inner Revolution*, referred to by Charles Johnson, *The Dharma of Social Transformation*, Tricycle, Winter 2006

of International Non-Governmental Organisations at the Council of Europe (this is Europe's leading human rights organisation, representing 47 European countries). The EBU has been active in promoting and applying human rights in various domains such as non-discrimination according to gender or to sexual orientation, but also in taking actions to make the internet a friendly environment ('No Hate Web - No Hate Speech' is a campaign by the Council of Europe to make people aware of the dangers of hate speech and empower them with advise on how to react to it). We have set up internal networks to connect and create friendly environments in areas such as gender equality (Buddhism and Women network), prisoner care (Buddhist Chaplaincy network) and non-discrimi-nation of the LGBTI community (the Rainbow Sangha network). Earlier this year for example, the Rainbow Sangha network launched an initiative to stop gay conversion therapy which gained support from member organisations representing all major Buddhist traditions (more details can be found at our website: <http://europeanbuddhism.org/conversiontherapy>).

## **the metta-test: identifying and strengthening friendly environments**

If small steps can have a major impact, is there a way we could check the eudaimonistic quality of our decisions before it is too late? I think there is. We could check the eudaimonistic quality of every law, every policy in every organisation, before we put it into practice. In line with Raworth's doughnut model, such a quality test would contain three core elements. First, an **environmental impact check**. This is the outer circle in the Raworth's doughnut model. It basically focuses in how far the policy proposal will share eudaimonia with future generations, most obviously on things like pollution and global warming. Second, a **social impact check**. This is the inner circle in Raworth's doughnut model. Here, the question is how far the proposed policy will share eudaimonia with other people on our planet. What will the impact be on employment? On poverty? On human rights? Such rulings could prevent elites from taking the whole cake, something our generation is probably failing at more than any generation before us. And last but not least, the centre of the doughnut. For whatever rule or target is set, we can ask ourselves: what will its impact be on human interactions? Will it stimulate them, will it make it harder for people to connect? Does it contribute to a hostile environment or to a friendly environment? I would call it a **relational impact check**, or with Buddhist vocabulary, a **metta-test**. Is this utopian? Of course it is. But so were environmental impact checks when they were first proposed. Will such a metta-test solve all problems? Will there be no more difference

in opinion? Of course not. But it might warn us before we go in the wrong direction.

Let me give you an example from the UK. Recently, the UK government required doctors to check the legal documents of all their patients and share that information with the Home Office. This was obviously not to provide them with better health care, but to identify people who could be considered for deportation out of the country. A parliamentary committee exposed how this created a climate of fear. People did not dare to go to hospital for care. People died.<sup>14</sup> A metta test could have predicted that such a rule would undermine doctor-patient trust, cause fear and avoidance behaviour and put the health of the most vulnerable in society at risk. It also undermined doctor-patient relationships. In short, it dehumanised and disconnected society.

When we put human flourishing instead of unlimited growth at the heart of our economy; when we put friendly environments at the heart of our politics; in other words when we make it clear in all our economic and political actions that we will leave no one behind; we can cure humanity of its addictions, redirect our economy and politics, and save our one and only planet. The experience of Buddhist spirituality on eliminating the three addictive poisons by cultivating behaviour and politics guided by metta and karuna can make a significant contribution to this process.

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<sup>14</sup>*U-turn on forcing NHS to hand patients' data to Home Office*, The Guardian, 10 May 2018