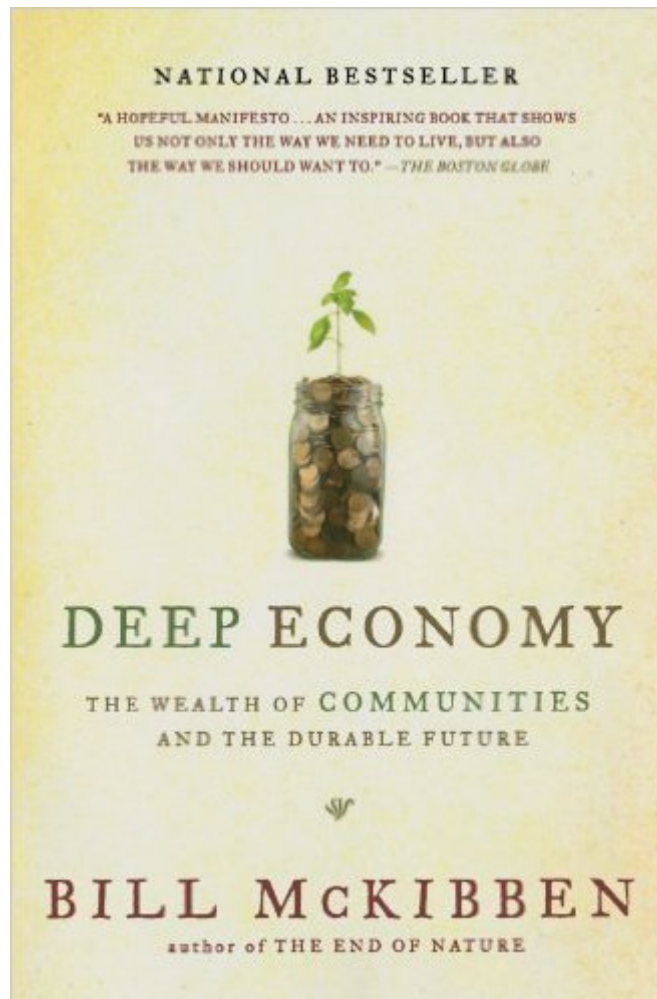


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Deep Economy: The Wealth Of Communities And The Durable Future



Synopsis

The bestselling author of *The End of Nature* issues an impassioned call to arms for an economy that creates community and ennobles our lives. In this powerful and provocative manifesto, Bill McKibben offers the biggest challenge in a generation to the prevailing view of our economy. For the first time in human history, he observes, "more" is no longer synonymous with "better"—indeed, for many of us, they have become almost opposites. McKibben puts forward a new way to think about the things we buy, the food we eat, the energy we use, and the money that pays for it all. Our purchases, he says, need not be at odds with the things we truly value. McKibben's animating idea is that we need to move beyond "growth" as the paramount economic ideal and pursue prosperity in a more local direction, with cities, suburbs, and regions producing more of their own food, generating more of their own energy, and even creating more of their own culture and entertainment. He shows this concept blossoming around the world with striking results, from the burgeoning economies of India and China to the more mature societies of Europe and New England. For those who worry about environmental threats, he offers a route out of the worst of those problems; for those who wonder if there isn't something more to life than buying, he provides the insight to think about one's life as an individual and as a member of a larger community. McKibben offers a realistic, if challenging, scenario for a hopeful future. *Deep Economy* makes the compelling case that the more we nurture the essential humanity of our economy, the more we will recapture our own.

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Customer Reviews

"Deep Economy" may be the most disturbing and challenging book published this year. Disturbing? It's like the doctor telling you that you have cancer. And not just you --- you and everyone you know. The good news: There is a cure. And with the energetic support of business and government, you and everyone you know can be saved. The bad news: Our economic system is based on a crude, outdated model: More = better. Blinded by the mantra of growth, our leaders will try to make that model last as long as possible --- even if they destroy the planet in the process. The challenging action item: You want to help save the world? Think local. Think community. Your reaction is mine: No way. Shopping at a farmer's market: nice, but unimportant. Better bus service: handy, but inconsequential. Solar panels and wind turbines: of anecdotal importance. At best, the "economics of neighborliness" will divert us as the temperature and water rise. On the other hand, this is Bill McKibben talking. And only a fool doesn't pay attention to this guy. In 1989, he published "The End of Nature," the first book to call attention to global warming. He's written about population control and television and the challenge of remaining human as the world becomes digitized. (And he's not just a brainiac. In "Long Distance," the 37-year-old McKibben put himself through Olympic-intensity training to see how good a cross-country skier he could become.) McKibben has the ability, rare among writers, of identifying a problem, reporting on it, thinking it through and proposing solutions --- all in 225 pages. Here the problem he sees is unchecked growth. The usual suspects say we're in no danger of draining the planet's resources.

This is a promising but ultimately disappointing book. Among its strengths: it is very well-written. Compared to books with similar themes by Herman Daly (e.g., "For the Common Good", written with John Cobb), Michael Shuman ("Growing Local"), and Gar Alperovitz ("Making a Place for Community", with Imbroscio and Williamson), this McKibben book is written in an accessible, engaging style, with plenty of real-world stories of interesting individuals. Another strength: This book is much fairer than the non-fiction essays by Wendell Berry on similar economic issues. McKibben at places does make a real attempt to acknowledge the arguments of economists about the benefits of economic growth and about the potential for economic adjustments to deal with some of the problems he identifies. This is particularly true in chapter 1, which critiques the mainstream view of economic growth. A third strength: chapter 3 contains some powerful arguments for putting a greater value on local communities in considering economic policy issues. However, ultimately I think McKibben shies away from really confronting the difficult issues he raises in a manner that would be convincing to a broad audience. As a result, I think the book is likely to be more of a comfort and support to readers who already agree with the views he expresses, rather than a powerful challenge

to readers who disagree. For example, one of McKibben's key arguments against economic growth is that economic growth will overuse energy, increase global warming, and damage various natural economic systems.

I've been a fan of the author since I read his book on *The Age of Missing Information*, and I then lost touch with his work. I was reminded of him by Paul Hawken, whose book *Blessed Unrest: How the Largest Movement in the World Came into Being and Why No One Saw It Coming* I will review this afternoon. *DEEP ECONOMY* is a very fine personal effort with a very straight-forward prescription for localizing food production, energy production, radio, and currency. The author is a gigantic intellect, and writes clearly. The core point in the first part of the book is an emphasis on a need to restore humanity to the process, to reduce industrial era efficiencies in order to enable more intangible values such as community. The opening chapter is a great review of the literature the author is familiar with, but I take off one star because the other books I list below are not mentioned, hence this great book is incomplete in that sense. The author puts forward three areas where life as we know it is going downhill: 1) Our political systems continue to emphasize industrialization and consolidation that is not affordable by our current rates of depleting energy and water; 2) There is not enough energy for China, let alone Brazil, India, Indonesia, Iran, Russia, Venezuela, and Wild Cards like Turkey and South Africa, to follow in our steps. 3) All this "more" is not making us happier.

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