

Acceptance speech

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Today's economic landscape would have been wholly unrecognizable in 1950, for the post War world has enjoyed unprecedented success in raising the standard of living. The global economy has grown more than 15 fold, per capita income has increased by a multiple of five to the current 20,000 international dollars a year, and absolute poverty has declined from around 60% of the world's population to under 10%, all this despite global population having increased from 2.5 billion to more than 8.1 billion. As economic commentators in recent years have repeatedly observed in books and essays, humanity has never had it so good.

This extraordinary achievement was made possible by the accumulation of produced capital (road, ports, buildings, machines), human capital (health, education, aptitude), and ideas (science and technology). The accumulation process transformed entire landscapes into agricultural fields as far as the eye can see and gleaming metropolises across the globe. That success has influenced the framing of economic problems and the search for ways to spread the good fortune everywhere to those who have been left behind.

But our global success has come with an increasingly impoverished biosphere, caused by mining, quarrying, and land-use changes. One sign of that impoverishment has been the extinction of species, currently at 100-1,000 times the average extinction rates in the previous several million years. Another sign has been declines in the biosphere's ability to meet our demands for its goods and services sustainably. The character of the global economy can thus be pictured on a coin, one side displaying skyscrapers, plantations, agricultural fields, animal farms, and highways in all parts of the world; the other side depicting shrunken lakes, dead oceanic zones, desiccated forests, bleached coral reefs, and infertile watersheds.

If that other side is even now absent from received economics, it is because today's decision makers, both in private and public institutions, are yesterday's students. The mutual influence of academic economics and decision making in the world at large and the depth of their combined imprint on the public's imagination is hard to overestimate. If biodiversity is absent from official economic reckoning today, it is because Nature has been absent from economics all along.

That absence should appear astonishing, for humanity is a part of Nature, and the human economy is embedded in her. For some four decades now, I have tried to introduce Nature, bit by bit, into economic reasoning. This has been a slow process, because filling in the blank spaces in economics has meant having to re-write every chapter in it. The opportunity to prepare a review of the economics of biodiversity for the UK government enabled me to put those decades of work together into a comprehensive whole: *The Economics of Biodiversity: The Dasgupta Review*, commissioned by Her Majesty's Treasury and published in 2021. And I am delighted that the BBVA Foundation has shown its appreciation of that work by bestowing on me its annual award in the category of Economics, Finance, and Management. I am deeply grateful.