

INTRODUCTION*

The Second International Conference on Gross National Happiness was held at St. Francis Xavier University in Antigonish, Nova Scotia, Canada, from June 20 to 24, 2005. Though few of those who attended the conference from outside Nova Scotia may have been aware of it before their arrival at the conference site, or even during the conference itself, Antigonish was a most appropriate place for a conference on “Rethinking Development: Local Pathways to Global Wellbeing,” the name and focus of the conference. Antigonish historically had been a region of social experimentation in a variety of ways at various times in its history. Now, again, it provided the venue for reconsidering traditional and orthodox patterns of thought and action in the spheres of social and economic development; traditional and orthodox because, on the whole, they are unquestioned by main-stream policy makers and official institutions.

The First International Conference on Gross National Happiness, “Operationalizing Gross National Happiness,” held in Thimphu, Bhutan, from February 18 to 20, 2004, was organized by the Centre for Bhutan Studies. That first conference took up a challenge laid down by His Majesty the King of Bhutan, Jigme Singye Wangchuck, when he declared that Bhutan’s development would be measured and evaluated not in terms of Gross National Product but in terms of Gross National Happiness. The concept of Gross National Happiness (GNH), not only as a way of measuring development but as a redefinition of the objective of development itself, and potentially, therefore, of the means to achieve development, struck a response chord not only within Bhutan but in many parts of the wider world.

In 1998, Lyonpo Jigmi Thinley, then the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Government of Bhutan, and now the Home Minister, addressed the UNDP Millennium Meeting for Asia and the Pacific Conference in Seoul, Korea, on Gross National Happiness. In the years since the idea has brought together various individuals and groups, reflections and practices, under rubrics such as “wellbeing” and “happiness,” concerned with such diverse matters as environmental protection, intelligent use of natural resources, cultural preservation, personal growth, good governance. As a glance at the programmes for both the First and the Second International Conferences on Gross National Happiness will show, the rubrics may be many but the concern that subsumes them all is singular: something is wrong with the way

* Professor Mark Mancall, Stanford University, US

things are going economically, socially, environmentally, and if we do not find an alternative approach to the development of the human community, the statistical success that is, or will be, indicated by measures such as Gross National Product may spell something approaching less than success (disaster?) for human beings.

Perhaps it was not entirely fortuitous that the King of Bhutan understood the difference between statistical development and social wellbeing. In a poignant way, Bhutan had, and perhaps continues to have, certain advantages that are unavailable to the more developed parts of the world. First, it was remote from the main thoroughfares of communication across the world. Today, since the introduction of television in 1999, it may be less remote, but it is still the case that its remoteness gives it an opportunity for contours reflection on the processes of “modernization” before rushing headlong into them. Second, it is, as we used to say, “underdeveloped,” which in this case means not only that it lacks the material standards of living characteristic of, say, Europe, North America or Southeast Asia; more importantly, it lacks the institutional structures that may lock it into place on one, and not another, path of development and change. Third, it is poor, which means that “wealth” is not yet a clearly defined object, although that is certainly changing in some urban centres. These three characteristics: remoteness, underdevelopment, and poverty, allow Bhutan to consider the futures available to it and to plot out the path or paths it may want to follow to achieve the objective defined by His Majesty.

The First International Conference on GNH was intended to explore ways in which this concept of “happiness” as an objective of economic and social development could be operationalized in terms of both policy and evaluation of change. A great deal of time and energy at that conference was spent wrestling with definitions of the concept of happiness or wellbeing itself. On the one hand, it cannot be said that any definitive conclusions were reached about either action or thought in this regard. However, the conference must be judged a resounding success from the fact that it was a milestone in the history of international discourse on the topic; indeed, in many ways, it may be said to have opened up the discourse, bringing together as it did people from so many lands and cultures into one room, the Banquet Hall in Thimphu, where discussion and sometimes even debate took place in an open and free atmosphere shaped by concerns shared by the participants. All this is reflected in the proceedings of the conference (*Gross National Happiness and Development*, 2004, Thimphu: The Centre for Bhutan Studies).

The Second International Conference on Gross National Happiness, “Rethinking Development: Local Pathways to Global Wellbeing,” had an

entirely different character from the First Conference. If the Thimphu conference focused to a large extent on the concepts themselves, the Antigonish conference emphasized the exploration of practices and the sharing of actual experiences. The second conference built on the first and carried the subject further by focusing on what may be thought of as “reports from the field” as indicators not necessarily of the state of achievement of Gross National Happiness but of the variety of experiences and experiments “out there” that can orient us in one or another direction as we seek ways to operationalize the concept.

The range of experience and discussion stretched from the personal to the collective, and this could not have been better demonstrated than by two events at the opening session of the Conference. The first was an intense performance by a group of drummers from the Mi'kmaq First Nation. It was a collective performance that was experienced individually by every participant present in the MacKay Room at the Bloomfield Centre of St. Francis Xavier University in Antigonish, the host institution for the conference. The second was Guided Meditation conducted by Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche on the topic “Inner and Outer Development and the View of Interdependence: Reflection on inner motivation and inspiration and its connection to creating a better world.” The participation of Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche at the beginning of this gathering was particularly appropriate. He is the head of the Shambhala Buddhist lineage. Shambhala is a mythical land in Buddhist imagery, which is a kind of utopia where not only do people live an ideal Buddhist life, with the profound social and personal implications that implies, but where the virtues required to live that kind of life and to defend it are cultivated, most particularly the virtues of a courageous warrior. Not only the content of the Rinpoche's talk and meditation but his very presence at the opening of the conference suggested, perhaps, the virtues that the struggle for Gross National Happiness and redirecting the development process require.

It is a pity that neither the drumming nor the guided meditation can be reproduced in this volume, because each, in its own way, using its own medium of discourse, encapsulated the spirit of the conference that followed the opening session.

The Conference proceeded in a variety of formats from June 20 to 24, 2004. It is a tribute to its organizers that it gave the participants such a range of formal and informal means of learning and communicating with each other. In addition to the plenary sessions, there were workshops in which participants engaged each other on subjects that ran the gamut from “globalization and wellbeing to “natural building, walking, contemplative practices.” Some of the most important topics were raised,

and experiences exchanged in these workshops in an informal way. The clustered together around the “Four Pillars of Gross National Happiness”: economic development, good governance, the environment and cultural preservation and development. To cite but one example: in the workshop entitled “The Role of Indigenous Knowledge in Nation-Building and Environmental Sustainability,” Canadian First Nation representatives spoke in pragmatic terms about particular ways in which environmental policies were related to tradition and to indigenous knowledge and how each impacted on the other. A discussion of the relationship between the modernization of fishing practices and traditional social structures and knowledge turned a remarkable demonstration of the ways in which experience could be exchanged between people drawn from profoundly different cultures.

Other opportunities to learn and exchange were provided by a documentary film festival that engaged almost every topic discussed at the conference, by “nutrition breaks,” musical performances, scheduled contemplative practices for those who wished to participate in them, and perhaps most important of all, ample time and space for informal discussions in the hallways and on the spacious, if sometimes very warm, grounds of St. Francis Xavier University. This volume of selected papers from the conference at Antigonish can do no more than indicate the richness of the experience and the breadth of inquiry made possible.

These papers fall roughly into four categories. The first consists of the address of the Honourable Myra A. Freeman, the Lieutenant Governor of Nova Scotia, delivered at the opening session on Monday, June 20; the keynote address by Lyonpo Jigme Thinley, Bhutan’s Home Minister, and former Prime Minister, delivered on June 21; and the final keynote address by His Excellency John Ralston Saul, delivered on June 23. Taken together, these three addresses framed the conference itself and directed the participants’ attention to the future, after- and beyond-the-conference.

The second category contains one paper that is highly suggestive of the state of research into happiness and wellbeing, and the relationship of this research to economic and social policy. In recent years research in this area, often but not always based on statistical methods or the development of indices for happiness and wellbeing, has become very ramified indeed, and the paper published here only indicates the range of the types of research available.

The papers in the third are in the nature of “field reports” about specific practices, experiments, and experiences in the kinds of institutional and socio-economic change that aims at happiness and wellbeing. Finally, the fourth group includes four papers that remind us

that the past must speak to the future through the present, and that express the hope that must necessarily underlie all our endeavours. It must be noted that not all papers presented in the conference are published in this volume, and not all papers published in this volume were presented in the conference.

The Framework

The Honourable Myra A. Freeman, the Lieutenant Governor of Nova Scotia, opened the conference by pointing out that Bhutan and Nova Scotia were embarked on the same project, and that the conference had been inspired by His Majesty's and Bhutan's concept of Gross National Happiness. She defined it as the idea that "wellbeing arises in a society when sustainable and equitable development is balanced with environmental and cultural preservation and good governance." She followed this by insisting, "But that, surely, is an aspiration for all peoples and all societies everywhere - not only in Bhutan. Certainly here in Nova Scotia we aspire to create such a good and decent society right here on this very land..." Once that kind of society is built, she more than implied, Nova Scotia, like Bhutan, "... truly aspire[s] to be a beacon of good and balanced development from which others can learn and draw inspiration. Citing the Bhutanese definition of GNH, she suggested that realism and idealism are joined in the willingness to "listen and to learn from each other," the very purpose of the conference. In short, and in a brief and succinct fashion, she suggested that wellbeing cannot be the result of development; it must be within the very process of development. The "end" must be one of the "means" if a good and decent society is to be created. She laid down the gauntlet, not only for the conference but also for contemporary mainstream development theorists and practitioners, perhaps particularly of the Neo-liberal free-market persuasion.

Lyonpo Jigmi Y. Thinley, former Prime Minister, now Minister of Home and Cultural Affairs of Bhutan, and the President of the Council of the Centre for Bhutan Studies, picked up the Lieutenant Governor's challenge in his keynote address, "What is GNH?" He pointed out that GNH is a "holistic" approach to human needs, because without addressing both the material *and* the spiritual needs of the people-and-society, the "good and decent" society to which the Lieutenant Governor had referred, cannot be achieved. The core of GNH, he suggested, is that *both* physical, including social and economic, and spiritual wellbeing must be developed together in this modern world. The one without the other will not bring real happiness. For example, emphasis on "individual, competitive good" will not result in happiness. "We in

Bhutan are concerned," he said, "as to whether we would be able to create an alternative path of development that would cater to the cultivation of the fully developed human being and society. The fully developed human being is not the same as putting [the individual] human being at the centre of development." In the present climate, then, GNH is not just an operational challenge; it is a conceptual challenge to both established theory and received spiritual wisdom.

Wealth, the speaker argued, does not bring happiness in and of itself, and this conclusion is supported by research data. That being the case, if human existence is in its very nature holistic—the computer engineer and the peasant are at one and the same time both economic producers and spiritual human beings – the Home Minister asks, "Our physical needs may be addressed by the market and consumerism, but what about these social and communal bases of emotional wellbeing that are diminished by market economics?" GNH is concerned about the fact that what we might call "modernity" results in certain real problems, among which are issues of social existence, such as the weakening of the family structure, aging, the apparent increase in mental illness, depression, alcoholism and suicide, much of which is symptomatic of the consequences of market-led development based on "market economics."

GNH, he continued, "is a broader concept than our current specifications of GNH." GNH itself is a dynamic concept that must respond constantly to real challenges in the political and material world if it is to fashion a better society. "What is certain," he said, "is that in a state bearing responsibility for collective happiness, GNH must be a serious arbitrator of most of its public policies." The state cannot simply be a facilitator of development and wellbeing. "...it is very challenging to even envision what a GNH state would be like. The nature and theoretical foundations of a modern development state or libertarian democratic state are well-known. But the structures and processes of a GNH state are yet to be defined clearly, if it is at all distinct from either the ascendant liberal state or retreating socialist state. What will be the nature of GNH political economy?" In other words, the concept of GNH poses important theoretical challenges that must be faced if GNH policies are to lead to a better, a more decent society.

The minister raises profound issues for developing societies, like Bhutan, to consider. For example, he says "I also find the emphasis on rule of law to regulate human interrelationships intriguing. There is a paradox in preaching against conformity and promoting rule of law at the same time. Excessive emphasis on the rule of law to the extent of regulating most forms of human relationships and conduct by the state at the cost of social and customary norms and practices is, in my opinion,

state coercion to conform." At a time when so many developing nations have accepted the concept that the "rule of law," as it developed in the North Atlantic community historically and upon the adoption of which that community is insisting as a *sine qua non* for economic development and as a sign of commitment to its style of modernization, the Bhutanese keynoter's observation requires further and most careful consideration and could itself well be the subject of an important conference.

In the global context, he concluded, "The only difference between Bhutan and others is that we do not dismiss ... [this search for alternatives] as a utopian quest." Nor, indeed, did anyone else at the conference.

John Ralston Saul is one of Canada's pre-eminent political and social philosophers and a much-published keen analytical critic of the global scene. In his final keynote address, which he delivered on the last official day of the conference on June 23, he neatly completed the frame that Myra Freeman and Lyonpo Jigme Thinley had begun to construct on the first and second days. As the husband of the Governor General of Canada at that time, he commented on the subject at hand from a unique vantage point. Calling Bhutan "truly a remarkable country," he continued suggested that "it is not an accident that it's come up with one of the most disturbing concepts - 'Gross National Happiness'. Disturbing because it upsets completely what's in place everywhere else. Displaying his own sense of humour, he went on:

It is also a wonderful revelation of the Bhutanese sense of humour, which is laced with irony. And when faced with the boring certainty of Western economists, it is not at all surprising that His Majesty knocked them off their comfy chairs - he came up with a theory which they could not even understand. It is very Bhutanese, and tells you a great deal about the strength of their culture.

Gracefully weaving the concepts of GNH into the experience of Canada's First Nations in the far north and into Western history, he pointed out that this concept of happiness

... which has absolutely nothing to do with 20th-century theory of happiness. I mean, the Enlightenment theory of happiness is an expression of public good, of the public welfare, of the contentment of the people because things are going well. As opposed to the 20th-century Disneyland theory that happiness is a bright, white smile. One should not confuse these two ideas.

The contemporary mainstream discourse in the West about "the nature of the public good, the nature of democracy, the nature of citizenship, the nature of economics, the nature of what we ought to be

doing” has been a failure not in the end but “along the way.” The public discourse of the West must be changed, he declared. “It’s actually very valuable that an idea like Gross National Happiness would come from *outside* the West. Indeed, it’s much more likely that the idea would come from outside the West. Remember, in the 18th century, a large part of the ideas came from Asia. They did not come from Europe. They were *adapted* in Europe. “Once we accept that central language,” he insisted, meaning the language of the dominant discourse on development in all its aspects, “which is the *wrong* language,” we fail. GNH, he claimed, pointed at a new discourse, “a tough message”. Quoting Lyonpo Jigme Thinley, John Ralston Saul neatly closed the frame within which the conference had taken place:

“The conventional development, or economic growth paradigm, is seriously flawed and delusional.” Note that he said “delusional.” He is a Minister. He had no fear to use a word as strong as that, because it is only by using words that mock ridiculous language that you can knock it off its pedestal. And it *is* delusional – he is absolutely right. Why be polite?

And then he went on to say, “There is a growing level of dissatisfaction with the way in which human society is being propelled, without a clear and meaningful direction, by the force of its own actions.” In other words, by this sense of inevitability, of “there’s nothing we can do – we must remain passive” or “We have to move very quickly, and arrange the details so that we don’t do too badly out of these inevitable forces which are rolling ahead of us.”

Virtually all of the dominant economic theories in place were invented in the late 18th century to the mid-19th century – Smith, Ricardo, the whole rest of it – and we’ve been feeding off this stuff ever since. They were all based on societies in scarcity – agricultural, industrial scarcity. And competition, as defined by them, was part of a race through technology towards surplus, and that’s what got you fair prices and fair products.

In virtually every area of production in the world today, we are now in surplus, *massive* surplus. That doesn’t mean that everybody has access to it, but it’s available, if it could be got to people in proper conditions. ...

Completing the conference’s frame by providing his own incisive critique of “things as they are,” so to speak, John Ralston Saul implicitly returned the challenge of GNH and of rethinking development to the conference participants and to Bhutan. Neither political power nor discourse alone will effect change. We must develop a new discourse and gain political power to create a “good and decent society.”

Research

Johannes Hirata, from the Institute for Business Ethics at the University of St. Gallen in Switzerland and from Ibmec Business School in Sao Paulo, Brazil, raised an important question in his paper, "How Should Happiness Guide Policy? Why Gross National Happiness is not opposed to Democracy." The paper is included here as an example of the kind of theoretical research which must be produced to provide substance to the concept of GNH. It is suggestive of the kind of research that must develop if we are to produce a discourse of GNH, the new discourse for which John Ralston Saul called.

Hirata argues by way of suggesting a shift in the public debate about development:

If public debates were centered around happiness rather than economic conditions, one might expect that people's inner life would be taken into the equation of development. In this sense, GNH-inspired theories appear to be more complete than mainstream development approaches that are exclusively concerned with the living *conditions* and not at all with *living*.

Today all policy debates assume, or should assume, a democratic framework in which they need to be conducted. In a representative democracy, as defined in Bhutan's new Draft Constitution, due to come into effect in 2008, there is a presumption, Hirata argues, that the citizens do not surrender their judgment to their elected representatives; they only "suspend their judgment on individual decisions, but their trust (or absence) in decision makers is of course in its turn a judgment..." However, he suggests indirectly, even a deliberative democracy must function within certain assumptions that go beyond the formalistic structures that constitute a democratic system of governance. For example, he points out,

...policy recommendations whose aim, or incidental effect, is to seriously undermine deliberative democracy would not be admissible in the same way as an unconstitutional party would not be admissible in a multi-party democracy. "Not admissible" is of course meant in the sense of not being morally admissible rather than in the sense of being illegal.

To a certain extent, the dominant political discourse on democracy may assume the existence of an almost Platonic ideal of a democratic system, much as the dominant economic discourse seems to assume the objective existence of an almost Platonic idea of the economic system it assumes as the basis of the policy proposals that derive from it. Hirata says that "purely mechanical arguments based on alleged natural social

laws" are not sufficient to argue for the implementation, by legislation or administration, of any particular policy recommendation. The system itself cannot be used to legitimate everything it can do.

For example, it would be problematic to recommend a particular measure, even if it concerns the extension of democratic participation rights, based simply on statistical evidence that such a measure tends to increase citizens' happiness. Such a justification reflects a view of citizens as happiness functions and of policy makers as social engineers that have to fulfil some independent objectives. It fails to address the reasons the citizenry may or may not have to make the recommended cause their own.

The ability of a legislature or bureaucracy to act legally in a particular fashion is not sufficient to legitimate that action. The process must be grounded in morality if it is to be legitimate, and Hirata defines morality, in this respect, as meaning that they [parliamentarians, bureaucrats] respect others' moral rights for other than strategic reasons, i.e., to judge and act from the moral point of view. Morality, in this sense, simply means that I do not (ab)use the other only as a means in my strategic calculus, but that I care also about him or her as a vulnerable human being.

Hirata's argument is much more refined and complex than this indicates, but it leads to the inescapable conclusion that both those who act for the people, either as parliamentarians or as bureaucrats, and the people themselves much share some kind of common discourse that grounds, but definitely is not the same thing as, the formalistic arrangements for a democratic system. Legitimacy derives from the discourse; the system cannot legitimate itself.

Reports from the Field

This volume includes seventeen "field reports" which are subdivided into three categories of papers: first, broad research aimed at specific policy developments; second, instances of specific practices; and, third, institutional development.

Broad research

The first category contains three papers. One is a report on an on-going research project. GPI Atlantic, one of the primary organizers and sponsors of the conference, has long been working on the development of more accurate, even more realistic, assessments of current policies, and the paper prepared by Ryan Parmenter, Seth Cain and Judith Lipp, "Assessing the Full Cost of Energy in Nova Scotia: A GPI Atlantic Approach" is an introduction to their work and, at the same time, highly

suggestive of the kind of work that needs to be done elsewhere, both geographically and economically. The report shows that current ways of establishing the cost of an economic activity do not necessarily reflect its real cost and, therefore, the assumptions about the cost of an activity that underlie decisions concerning that activity are not “informed” and serve the interests of one particular group or another rather than of society as a whole.

The report examines the full cost of energy production in the Nova Scotia, but it is primarily demonstrative because it had to be based on available data, which was sufficient for only two categories of phenomena: air pollutants and greenhouse gases. Ultimately, the authors say, the effects of “the extraction, production, transportation, marketing and use of energy” impact “people’s health, the environment, and society... Few of these effects are reflected in the market price of energy.” But these impacts are not reflected in the market price of energy and, by extension, figured into any accounting process. The project seeks to use “full-cost accounting” principles for this purpose. (The author of this introduction would like to point out that a Professor of Accounting at a prestigious Business School in the United States once remarked to him that accounting is, after all, an ideological matter, i.e., the decision to use one or another accounting method depends on prior conscious or unconscious ideological choices; accounting is not “empirically objective” in any way.) As the authors point out,

[The] aggregate cost estimates [produced by the researchers] represent only a small fraction of the true costs of energy as these do not include cost impacts associated with energy affordability, reliability, security, research costs, subsidies, land use, and land and water contamination. Despite these exclusions, limitations and difficulties of costing exercises, the very act of considering the full costs of energy is extremely important.

The real costs that are examined in “full-cost accounting” are “not reflected in decision making.” Indeed, “As a society we currently measure our progress primarily according to economic rates of growth.” The implication is that a statistically high growth rate that does not reflect the real cost of, for example, energy production, falsifies the significance of the statistical measure of growth. This must have profound implications for economic planning in general and for GNH in particular.

Dr. Chenchu Dorji’s paper on “The Myth Behind Alcohol Happiness” concerns the issue of the costs of development and modernization. He is a consultant psychiatrist and technical advisor to the National Health Programme in Bhutan and is well-known for his

research into, and concerns about, the relationship between health and GNH.

Dr. Chencho examines alcoholism in Bhutan in an historical, a Bhutanese social, and a Buddhist context. He notes that

Before modern development started in Bhutan in the early 1960s, production and use of alcohol was confined to domestic use. This was limited by the availability of food grains to brew alcohol and the demands of society....

With development, however, came many changes in Bhutan including changes in alcohol consumption patterns. The production (domestic and industrial), consumption and importing of alcohol in the country has increased significantly in recent years.

Growing affluence due to development not only promotes the use of alcohol but also provides opportunities to pursue pastimes where alcohol is a regular feature. Bars, poolrooms, and restaurants that sell alcohol are mushrooming in urban areas and becoming popular nightspots to chill out after a hard day's work.

The costs in increased health expenditures are high. He notes, "Two studies by the Ministries of Agriculture, Trade, and Industry in rural villages point out that as much as 50 percent of the grain harvests of households are used to brew alcohol each year." Moreover,

In a drive to increase domestic revenue..., the Royal Government liberalized the sale and cost of bar licenses in 1999. Now there is one bar for every 250 Bhutanese and 10 bottles of alcohol per year for every man, woman and child in Bhutan. This is alarming news to Bhutanese, whose national goal is to achieve Gross National Happiness.

The author suggests that the Bhutanese government pursue with regard to alcohol a policy similar to the one it has adopted with regard to tobacco, namely, impose a ban. In the developed world, the production, advertising, and sale of alcohol is a major industry in whose accounting methods the consequential results of alcohol consumption are not figured as a cost. It is even a politically powerful industry. Dr. Chencho suggests that developing societies still have a choice to make:

A concerted decisive effort by all Bhutanese in a campaign against alcohol will set another milestone in achieving our development goal of Gross National Happiness. In so doing, we will not only be a step closer to our own target, we will also be contributing to global well-being and happiness.

Kinley Dorji, the editor of *Kuensel*, until recently Bhutan's only newspaper, now published on a semi-weekly basis, and Siok Sian Pek, report on the media in Bhutan and make recommendations concerning the media in the service of Gross National Happiness. With the appearance in 2006 of two new weekly newspapers, and the potential for further changes in the media in Bhutan, their analysis of the impact of the media, including the introduction of television in 1999, and their recommendations for the future, are of very cogent matters.

The media, they argue, are vital to the progress of GNH, and they must play more than the reportorial role that, theoretically, they play in more advanced industrial societies. They write, on a theme already alluded to in this Introduction,

The Bhutanese media is still in its infancy but infancy can be an advantage. We are starting at the beginning and have vast global and regional experiences to draw from. ... Just as *Kuensel* missed decades of the hot metal press and began the newspaper on a modern desk-top publishing system, Bhutanese media can make the best use of the ICT revolution. It must fulfill the progressive policies established by an enlightened leadership.

But, they also point out,

The Bhutanese media must be conscious that it functions in the environment of a small vulnerable society that survives on the strength of a distinct cultural identity. The development of the media must, therefore, show sensitivity to this cultural and social complexity in the environment of the rapid political transformation. ...

GNH represents an enlightened approach to development and change. The Bhutanese media has a central role in the operationalization of GNH, not just to inform, educate, and entertain the audience, but to truly empower people so that they develop the ability and achieve the freedom to attain happiness.

Reports on specific practices

The second subcategory of reports from the field contains five papers, or reports, that are, as it were, case studies of on-going institutional processes that are rooted in the values of GNH and wellbeing.

Catherine O'Brien examined happiness from the perspective of impact on children of urban planning, particularly transportation. Urbanization, as a phenomenon characteristic of the 21st century from Thimphu to Bangkok to any city in the world "means that more than ever, we need to accentuate efforts towards sustainable cities." O'Brien

argues that happiness is “not generally discussed in transportation planning literature. In fact, many adults might even see transportation and happiness as an oxymoron.”

“How might cities and towns look if we adopted the notion of Gross National Happiness in our urban planning – perhaps even going so far as to honour the sacredness of individuals and nature?” To answer her question, O’Brien examines the policies and experiences of Enrique Peñalosa, the mayor of Bogotá, Colombia, who “initiated the first car-free day in Bogotá.” She quotes one interview with Peñalosa:

If we in the Third World measure our success or failure as a society in terms of income, we would have to classify ourselves as losers until the end of time. Given our limited resources, we have to invent other ways to measure success, and that could be in terms of happiness. It may be in how much time children spend with their grandparents, or the ways in which we are able to enjoy our friendships, or how many times people smile during the week. A city is successful not when it’s rich but when its people are happy.

O’Brien supports Peñalosa’s remarks with observations of psychologists and other social scientists. Peñalosa, through O’Brien, could well be speaking to the way in which underdevelopment may be understood as a positive value in planning for greater happiness, wellbeing, and satisfaction.

As mayor of Bogotá, Enrique Peñalosa developed policies and took measures in the field of urban planning that sought, evidently with considerable success, to define city planning in terms other than efficiency. “He did it all, in part, by declaring a war on private cars.”¹ Using “happiness” as his criterion for traffic policy-making, he said:

And what are our needs for happiness? We need to walk, just as birds need to fly. We need to be around other people. We need beauty. We need contact with nature. And most of all, we need not to be excluded. We need to feel some sort of equality.²

His answer to the traffic and pollution problem was not a bus system but a return to walking. However, he also understood that that in itself was insufficient; he needed to create public places, to exclude cars from thoroughfare where people could walk instead, beautify these areas... Rather than create monumental public spaces, he created modest pedestrian parks, for example. He is now widely recognized as having radically improved a major third-world city on which most city planners

¹ <http://www.thetyee.ca/Views/2006/06/23/Mayor>.

² *ibid.*

had given up hope of rescuing from the material and human detritus of development.

Francisco VanderHoff Boersma, a Mexican “Worker Priest” and the Founder of Fair Trade, presents a rich and detailed report on the history and experience of UCIRI, a cooperative organization of farmers in a particular region of Mexico who sought to improve their lives by organizing, and paying attention to the production and marketing of their produce, primarily, but not only, coffee. The report contains, in essence, a model for the growth of rural cooperatives in developing countries, particularly where the world market and the WTO are or will have an impact on agriculture in countries where a significant proportion of the population still lives in villages and works in agriculture. The entire report deserves close scrutiny, including the appendices. I would like to direct the reader’s attention particularly to “Five conditions for sustainable production in general and for the production of coffee in particular.” These five conditions are very interesting in light of the discussion of GNH and the rethinking of development: environmental conservation, the democratic control of the economy, egalitarianism, efficiency, and freedom. This is not a list that one would expect in such a context. A sustainable economy in today’s market world, the author argues, requires the organization of producers to give them control over their own product and an equitable access to the market. He suggests that “We have to identify and articulate new forms of efficiency that will truly make work a democratic and economic act.” Finally, he raises the question of freedom itself:

Liberalism is a catchphrase that takes in all measures that are supposedly favorable for the free market. The problem is that the rules of the market have changed but the freedom of the market has not been increased. A truly free market is necessary for the creation of sustainable coffee and [an] agricultural economy. Freedom can only exist in a sustainable form when there is complete respect for the freedom of others. The current resistance to neo-liberalism is not only an internal criticism that asks the question for whom is there sufficient freedom and for whom is there not? Mutuality is essential. There is a price, not just a political one but one that is also economic, cultural, and social [for the lack of mutuality in freedom].

The third field report in this subcategory was presented at the conference by Ray C. Anderson, the founder and Chairman of Interface Inc. This is one of the world’s largest commercial interior furnishing companies and functions on a global scale. Anderson reports on how he is making the company sustainable in environmental, social, and

economic terms. "You should first understand," he tells us, "that I speak as an industrialist, some would say a radical industrialist, but as competitive as anyone you know and as profit minded." He spells this out in his book, *Mid-Course Correction: Toward a Sustainable Enterprise: The Interface Model* (White River Junction: Chelsea Green Publishing Company, 1998).

His goal, he says in both his Antigonish report and his book, is to demonstrate through actual practice that a large firm can be both profitable and engage in sustainable practices. In many respects this report is personal and autobiographical, which is precisely why it makes such compelling reading. He is profoundly concerned "to do the right thing," and doing this, he says, "is driven by enlightened self-interest."

Not only does ecology tell us we are part of nature, not above or outside of it; it also tells us that what we do to the web of life we do to ourselves. *Industrial* ecology tells us the industrial system, as it operates today, simply cannot go on and on and on, taking, making, wasting - abusing the web of life.

In his book, Anderson defines sustainability in an important and fresh way:

There is not an industrial country on earth, and - I feel pretty safe in saying - not a company or institution of any kind...that is sustainable, *in the sense of meeting its current needs without, in some measure, depriving future generations of the means of meeting their needs.* (p. 7, emphasis added)

What is most interesting in this perspective is the suggestion that all economic activity, whether in state-owned and -managed enterprises, national development plans, or private enterprises, must take into account future generations in defining current or immediately-future time. Defining his own experience, he says, "At Interface, we have undertaken a quest, first to become sustainable and then to become restorative." (p. 7). In accord with almost everyone who has spoken and written on issues of sustainability, Anderson argues, in his personal voice, that

...I am a plunderer of the earth and a thief - today a *legal* thief. The perverse tax laws, by failing to correct the errant market to internalize those externalities such as the costs of global warming and pollution, are my accomplices in crime. (p. 7)

He has used his firm, Interface, to develop an industrial and business practice that is both profitable and sustainable in the terms he defines.

Anderson makes another point that is worth pondering. Citing the economist Lester Thurow, he writes:

I have read that...that we are already in the *third* industrial revolution. [Thurow] holds that the first was steam powered; the second, electricity powered; making possible the third, which is the information revolution, ushering in the information age. Clearly, all three stages have emerged with vastly different characteristics, and it can be argued that each was revolutionary in scope.

However, I take the view that they all share some fundamental characteristics that lump them all together with an overarching, common theme. They were and remain an unsustainable phase in civilization's development. For example, someone still has to manufacture your 10 pound laptop computer, that icon of the information age. (p. 9)

He then goes on to show that a 10-pound laptop is the end result of a process that costs up to 40,000 pounds of materials, not to mention the cost of pollution, etc. In short, he calls into question the idea that developing countries can use the computer to create sustainable economies, at least in his terms. A more thoroughgoing "rethink" is necessary.

In concert with the point made by John Ralston Saul about contemporary economic theory, Anderson says that the industrial system of which we are a part developed in a different world from the one we live in today: fewer people, more plentiful natural resources, simpler lifestyles. What a difference today!

He challenges other businessmen, many of whom, he tells us, do not want to examine the proofs his experience offers, to make their case for business as usual:

What is the business case for destroying the basic infrastructure of civilization itself, the natural systems upon which everything depends, including the economy? For what economy can exist without air, water, materials, energy, food, *plus* climate regulation, an ultra-violet radiation shield, pollination,...The economist would say, all these are externalities and do not count in the financial system? Talk about a flawed view of reality! How can it be good business to externalize them and assume license to destroy them by arbitrarily saying they don't count.

Anderson's remarks reflect the same conclusions that the report on "Assessing the Full Cost of Energy in Nova Scotia" presents. Anderson also seems to be speaking to GNH within a single firm, which makes for a unique perspective and provides not a little food for thought.

Interestingly, *Fortune*, surely the journal *par excellence* of the American business community, has named Anderson's firm as one of the "100 Best Companies to Work For".

Joel Salatin is widely recognized as one of the most innovative farmers in the United States. At his farm in the state of Virginia, he has developed an agricultural practice "combining science, art and ideals from nature to create a farm that is highly profitable but produces zero waste."³ To summarize concisely the principles of Salatin's agricultural practice (which were presented orally and discursively at greater length):

Food production should be aromatically and aesthetically pleasing...If our food production system stinks, [it] doesn't bring much happiness.

This is an interesting parallel in agriculture to Peñalosa's urban development policies.

Animals are healthiest when they ingest copious amounts of green material.... There is no wonder we have obesity and cholesterol problems when we take away the exercise, fresh air, sunshine, high vitamins and minerals; and feed animals a high starch diet in a stressful environment in a fecal factory, inhumane, concentration camp farm.

...we do a lot of large-scale composting, letting pigs do the work. We don't use big, heavy metal machines to [make] compost piles. We inject corn and let the pigs do the work.

Farm according to nature, not in contest with nature.

Keep using fresh ground, the way animals do.

Pay attention to bioregional food systems. Feed your own community first.

Technology is used to enhance the biological happiness on the farm, not to substitute for it.

Balance. Ecological, emotional, and economic - all these elements have to be balanced.

While Salatin speaks from the vantage point of a highly developed agricultural world in the United States, he seems to be suggesting that societies that are still at the subsistence level of agriculture, or not far from it, can make choices concerning the paths that lead to a more productive agriculture. His second principle also echoes the argument made by Dr. Chenchu Dorji concerning the costs of development, i.e., we

³ <http://www.gpiatlantic.org/conference/reports/21amplenary.htm>

seek development but do not reckon the costs of success in our evaluation of the path we are going to choose.

Farouk Jiwa is the co-founder and Director of Honey Care Africa, “a small private sector organization that has been working to promote sustainable community-based bee keeping initiatives” in Africa. Like Ray Anderson, he works to create for-profit social enterprises, in this case in East Africa. He is keenly aware of the problems that aid brings with it:

Over the last little while we have seen the donors coming in with their own specific agendas. They have worked over a very similar timeframe. They have had good success in some areas and these have been fantastic while the funding lasted. When the money disappears, things begin to deteriorate very quickly.

He has developed a “social enterprise model” as a key to “sustainable, community-based agriculture, both in terms of biodiversity conservation and poverty reduction.” This model, which his Honey Care Africa actually is, defies “the traditional compartmentalization between development sector and private sector.” It uses what he calls “a triple bottom line approach.”

For those of you who are unfamiliar with the term, it is basically trying to generate environmental, social and economic values simultaneously.

In other words, the sub-text, as it were, of Anderson’s industrial enterprise and Jiwa’s agriculture enterprise overlap in a surprising way. This is particularly interesting when one recalls the main-stream discursive practice of opposing agriculture to industry or of making one dependent upon the other. Anderson and Jiwa both seem to be reporting on a new kind of enterprise that goes beyond the kind of enterprise characteristic of industrial capitalism or industrial socialism.

Reports on institutional developments

The third subcategory contains four reports on institutional development. Many speakers at the conference referred to the importance of the rethinking of development. Thakur S. Powdyel, one of Bhutan’s leading educationalists, formerly Vice-Principal of Sherubtse College, Bhutan, and now Director of the Centre for Education Research and Development, under the Royal University of Bhutan, reports on the project for the development of the Royal University of Bhutan “as an instrument of Gross National Happiness.” The University, he argues, cannot just train the personnel infrastructure of existing society.

This is the challenge for the Royal University of Bhutan: engineering and rediscovering the true mission of education and bring[ing] it to bear

on the reshaping of the society. It has to find its culmination in much more than achieving parity with other universities in the conventional sense of the term, but in being a mighty instrument in influencing the minds and habits of people.

Powdyel in effect makes the University one of the central institutions for Bhutan's achievement of Gross National Happiness. The University of Bhutan is a work-in-progress, and at the same time that he reports on it he also challenges it to transcend the contemporary models on which it may be based.

Sanjit Bunker Roy is the founder of Barefoot College in India. It is "the only college in India for the poor. It was built by the poor and only for the poor." At the present time there are over twenty Barefoot Colleges in India. Taking his brief from Mark Twain's admonition, "Never let school interfere with your education," Roy listened first.

I got only people who were dropouts, cop-outs and wash-outs from the villages, very remote, in the middle of nowhere. We built the college together. We changed the whole concept of what is an expert. An expert for us is an ordinary man from another town – someone who has a different vision, someone who is practical, someone who is down to earth.

Decentralization and practical application of practical knowledge, "demystification," as Roy would say, are central to the enterprise.

How do you demystify the most sophisticated of technologies for the semi-literate, illiterate men and women? Today, all along the Himalayas from Ladakh to Sikkim, 300 villages have been solar-electrified by people who are all semi-literate or illiterate. And, incidentally, there happens to be a solar engineer who is illiterate but still looks after repairs.

Gill Seyfang, Centre for Social and Economic Research on the Global Environment, University of East Anglia, Great Britain, closely examines the institution of money in mainstream thought and practice and proposes that money requires redefinition and change if GNH and wellbeing are to be achieved, perhaps, he says, in the form of "community currencies." It should be noted carefully that Seyfang discusses money itself, not the "monetary system". He provides a four-fold critique of existing money. First, money serves two contradictory functions: it is both a medium of exchange and a "store of value." Therefore, there is a tendency to hoard it, to keep it from circulation, which, in turn, results in a shortage of money with profound consequences for unemployment and the inability to meet society's

needs. Second, money in its present state is highly mobile, which is not a good thing for local or underdeveloped economies.

Third, the current pricing regime upon which mainstream money is founded values some kinds of wealth and overlooks others, with profound implications for the signals sent by markets and hence development goals in general. Environmental and social costs and benefits are externalized from economic prices, and so are not accounted for in economic decision-making. This results in economic behaviour which degrades social quality of life and the environment but which is entirely rational within the market framework.

His fourth critique of the existing money system is that “mainstream money and its system of exchange actively promotes particular types of behaviour and discourages others,” and the implications of these effects are detrimental to sustainable consumption.

Seyfang’s proposals for a reconsideration of the money system reflect VanderHoff Boersma’s conditions for the development of a sustainable economy. Seyfang says,

In order for this evolution [to a new money system] to occur, a number of policy changes are required, the most fundamental of which is a shift in thinking and organization, away from the top-down command and control of the economy, towards a more open, flexible, adaptable structure which allows experimentation and the spontaneous emergence of new exchange systems.

Khenpo Phuntsok Tashi, the Director of the National Museum of Bhutan, located in Paro, Bhutan, analyzes the actual and potential role of a traditional institution or, more precisely, a traditional figure, in the promotion of Gross National Happiness. In “The Positive Impact of the Gomchen Tradition on Achieving and Maintaining Gross National Happiness,” Khenpo Phuntsok Tashi provides what may be the first extensive discussion of the gomchen, a kind of lay, or un-monasteried, monk, in English, and demonstrates the wide social role this figure has played and will be able to play in this area. He also makes transparent the relationship between “spiritual” practice and Gross National Happiness, including the political values of spiritual practice. “Nowadays,” he says,

samsara may look different because it involves more technological advances, more modern progress, and more sophisticated advertisements that pull on the desires of human beings, but this is still just the same old samsara, and the gomchen lama still has the same job. He will continue on the path of enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings and try to turn them all toward freedom

from suffering. This is his purpose in life and what he has vowed to do with his true awakened heart. Such a pure devotion to the happiness of all other sentient beings must have an influence on the GNH of Bhutan because the programme and the gomchen lama meet on a common ground of bodhicitta, the source of both relative and ultimate happiness.

He provides us with a fascinating example of the reinterpretation of tradition within modernity or, perhaps more accurately, of the application of tradition to modernity not as resistance but as facilitator.

From Past to Future

The papers in the fourth and last category of this volume are unique or serve us well by way of summation.

Frank Bracho, an economist trained at Stanford University, committed to Gandhian values, and former Venezuelan Ambassador to India, as well as the author of several books on sustainable development, health and culture, discusses "Happiness and Indigenous Wisdom in the History of the Americas". Many of the participants at the conference, including John Ralston Saul, suggested the importance of "indigenous wisdom" and "indigenous knowledge" to the consideration of wellbeing and in the rethinking of development. Bracho places the discourse about GNH in an interesting historical context:

The United States' Declaration of Independence, for example, specifies "the pursuit of happiness" as one of the new nation's fundamental aspirations, and fathers of this manifesto, such as Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin in their body of political ideas, made happiness a central good. Simon Bolivar, leader of the independence of several South American republics, did the same when he affirmed: "*The most perfect system of government is that which produces the greatest possible amount of happiness...*"... In those eighteenth century times, happiness was usually linked to feelings of safety and personal and social stability.

Bracho addresses the question of the nature of the values that he believes must be the base of GNH and wellbeing. He mines the literature of Native American wisdom to show that from it one can deduce that to reach happiness, definitively, the aspects of "being", linked to the transcendent and more lasting, are more important than those of "having", linked to the less transcendent and more transitory.

The unspoken but very present challenge his paper presents concerns the ways in which indigenous knowledge and wisdom can be brought into the discourse of active institutional as well as personal transformation in the rethinking of the development in the already overly complex world which we inhabit.

Dorji Penjore, a member of the research staff of the Centre for Bhutan Studies, discusses the role of folktales in the transmission of traditional values in "Folktales and Education: The Role of Bhutanese Folktales in Value Transmission." He examines one particular folktale as an illustration, and also points to various Buddhist holy men, particularly Drukpa Kinley, particularly important in Bhutan, to discuss the role the figures of these men play.

Dorji Penjore is particularly interested in the way folktales are not used in contemporary Bhutanese education and makes specific recommendations about that. He also provides a trenchant critique of the texts and methods for teaching values in contemporary Bhutanese schools. Traditional knowledge and values are present in contemporary Bhutanese culture, he argues, but they are being squeezed out by the adoption of inappropriate texts and foreign methods when there are good Bhutanese stories that could teach the same values from a position closer to home and to the lives of the students.

Ela Bhatt, founder and first General-Secretary of the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in India, which is the largest single trade union in the country, reminds us of Gandhi's values, to which so many pay lip-service but so few follow. For people, development is not a project. It is not institutions. It is not even economics. It is about restoring balance. It is about the well-being of the poor woman, her family, her community and her work environment and this world we all live in. This we have learnt from Gandhiji.

Bhatt expands on Brach's point:

The spirit of Gandhi is in his understanding of indigenous institutions that could be small, democratic and dynamic. It was not glorifying poverty.

Holly Dressel, a Canadian journalist and author, provides a good summary of much of the discussion, when she says:

I think we can all agree that sustainability means being able to support ourselves and provide for our human needs without destroying the systems that will produce more timber, food and water, for example, for us and our children in the future.

Daring the conference participants to "Dream big!", she also reminds us to let her know when her criteria for change "don't work out, so I can be humble and flexible too!"

Finally, John Stutz, in "Economic possibilities for our grandchildren: progress and prospects after 75 years" brings the past directly into converse with the future in the present by bringing into play John

Maynard Keynes' essay from the 1930s, "*Economic Possibilities for our Grandchildren*". Keynes was optimistic when he looked forward to 2030, but as Stutz points out,

The future discussed by Keynes is now only 25 years away. Beginning with current data on income, [my] paper shows that progress beyond the struggle for subsistence has been limited to the Developed Countries and will likely remain so through 2030.

Moreover, he adds, "Among the Developed Countries, overwork, rather than living well is increasing." Underlying everything we have discussed, Stutz concludes,

one needs to address the question of value shift in a systematic and thorough fashion. These interesting and important issues are left for another day.

A Final Thought

Both the First and the Second International Conferences on Gross National Happiness are over and have become part of the history of Gross National Happiness, but their work has only just begun. The Second Conference followed naturally from the first, and it provided an important opportunity for the Bhutanese participants to learn from the practice and experience of the other participants from all over the world as well as to gain insight into their own reflections on the questions of happiness and wellbeing.

The Antigonish conference ended with more questions and challenges than conclusions. There is an old Chinese philosophical question about whether it is more difficult to know or to do. Antigonish showed that we all – though not everyone in the world, by a long shot – know what is wrong. And we have a fair idea about what is right. But the work of integrating all our concerns into a set of really shared and common objectives, their theoretical and conceptual elucidation, and a concerted plan of action to achieve those objectives, all that remains on the agenda for the future. It is time to continue working.

Dedication

Finally, and utterly gratuitously, the author of this introduction would like to take a cue from John Maynard Keynes, by way of John Stutz, and dedicate this introduction to his grandchildren, Kinley and Garab, and to the grandchildren, present and future, of all the participants in the Antigonish conference. And, in Bhutanese and Buddhist tradition, "May this volume of papers benefit all sentient beings."
