Chapter 3: Desirability of Sustainable Happiness as a Guide for Public Policy

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Introduction

Suppose a society is wealthy and treats its members justly. Can we be sure this is a good society? Not necessarily. Among other things, these virtues do not guarantee the happiness of its citizens. Nor that the society is just in its dealings with those outside its borders, or those not yet born. Its people may, for instance, be lonely. They might pass their lives surrounded by ugliness, largely disconnected from either natural or even human-made beauty. Their work might be tedious, unrewarding, and stressful. They might be too rushed to enjoy life, or to share very much of it with each other. Perhaps they are too preoccupied with their own pursuits to enjoy the fulfillments of serving others. And they might secure their lavish unhappiness at great cost to their descendants, to their neighbours elsewhere on the globe, and to the rest of life on earth. To be treated justly, and to have some measure of material wealth, are both important. But they do not suffice to make a good society.

Past economic growth has helped to bring great progress in the global reduction of illness and poverty, in the extension of human lives, and in the reduction of some important forms of inequality (Kenny, 2011). But the dominant model for pursuing happiness today is at best inefficient and unsustainable, favouring resource-intensive lifestyles that are unlikely ever to be available to all of humanity. To continue on the current path not only condemns much of humanity to deprivation in the present; it risks catastrophic environmental harms that will undermine future happiness in all nations. We cannot defer forever the encounter with environmental limits. We need to find more efficient, less costly ways of pursuing happiness.

This chapter briefly makes the case for sustainable happiness as a major goal of policy. Because the very idea of happiness policy remains controversial, we will focus on the basic justification for making sustainable happiness an important policy objective. But we will also discuss how the argument applies to the Gross National Happiness (GNH) approach proposed for the new development paradigm (NDP) in this report. While the origins of this approach lie in Bhutan, GNH policy is compatible with a wide range of ethical, religious, and political value systems, including the values of liberty prized in modern liberal democracies.

Definitions

We begin by explaining our key terms, sustainability and happiness. Regarding sustainability, a classic statement by the Brundtland Commission for the United Nations proffers that 'sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.' (The World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). What exactly this means in practice, whether this is the best way to define sustainability, or whether the notion of sustainability is the most useful way to think about our long-term responsibilities, remain disputed questions (Jamieson, 1998; Lutz Newton and Freyfogle, 2005; Bell and Morse, 2008; Vucetich and Nelson, 2010; Neumayer, 2012). However, we do not need to settle those debates here. However one defines sustainability, the current approach to development is unsustainable, in a way that should concern everyone. Without a change of course, no realistic amount of technological innovation will prevent a serious degradation in the quality of life on earth.

What is meant by 'happiness'? This section will briefly examine some definitions of happiness, but we note that the concept of happiness can be useful even if we do not all agree on an exact definition. For even when "happiness" is used as as a fairly open-ended term, we can use it to carry on an important kind of conversation or discourse. Towards the end of this chapter, we address this 'happiness lens' approach, and identify some ways in which conversations change and attention is steered when happiness is introduced as a theme.

Regarding definitions of happiness, we can distinguish two types: philosophical and operational. A *philosophical* definition specifies the essence or nature of happiness: what happiness is, such that certain things contribute to it or can be seen as indicators of it. An *operational* definition specifies what, in practice, we focus our attentions on. What do use as our gauge of happiness? People from widely varying philosophical perspectives might still agree on an operational definition of happiness, for instance because they agree that things like health are crucial indicators of happiness, even if they disagree about why health ultimately matters.

From an operational standpoint, this report defines happiness in terms of the nine domains of GNH policy outlined in Chapter One:

1. Psychological wellbeing
2. Population health
3. Educational attainment
4. Living standards
5. Good governance

6. Community vitality, connectedness and service
7. Time use and balance
8. Ecological resilience and diversity
9. Cultural resilience and diversity

This operational definition has three noteworthy features. First, it does not treat happiness simply as a state of mind, the way many researchers do (Haybron, 2011). Rather, it employs 'happiness' very broadly, as a general term for benefit—what is often called well-being or flourishing (Crisp, 2005). As understood in this report, happiness thus encompasses whatever benefits people (or other creatures that can be benefited or harmed).[1] This broader usage of the term has a long history and remains common among philosophers and historians, though much less so in the social sciences (e.g., Annas, 1993; White, 2006; McMahon, 2005).

Second, the list fundamentally concerns *societal*, not individual, happiness: it attempts to specify the key elements of a happy, thriving society. We will return to this point shortly.

Third, this list is compatible with a wide range of *philosophical* definitions of happiness. It does not try to tell us the essence of happiness, but simply to lay out what, in practice, should be the target of happiness policy. Philosophical definitions of happiness include (Crisp, 2005):

- **Mental state[2] theories**: happiness as a positive state of mind, such as pleasure and positive emotions, along with the absence of suffering.
- **Desire theories**: happiness as getting what you want.
- **Objective list theories**: happiness as getting things that are objectively good for us, like friendship, knowledge, accomplishment. For example, Aristotle's view of *eudaimonia*.

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[1] We note that this report is concerned with the well-being of all living things, not just human happiness. There are important philosophical questions about the moral status of sentient nonhuman animals, nonsentient organisms, and holistic entities like species and ecosystems. We set such questions aside here, save to note that there are respectable, if controversial, philosophical arguments for according basic moral consideration to all of these entities (Brennan and Lo 2008). Moreover, there is a broad philosophical consensus that, if nothing else, all sentient creatures—those organisms capable of suffering—have moral standing. For simplicity, we focus on the human case in this chapter.

[2] Mental state theories are sometimes called 'hedonistic' theories. However, to avoid confusion with the more common use of the term 'hedonistic' to mean 'valuing immediate sensual gratification,' we will instead use the term 'mental state'.

The operational approach to happiness taken in this report is compatible with all three of these philosophical views. In fact, the Buddhist tradition is standardly understood as employing a mental state conception of happiness, seen primarily as freedom from suffering (Ricard, 2006; Goodman, 2010). Yet Bhutan, which is largely a Buddhist society, promotes happiness by focusing on the nine dimensions of GNH.

To illustrate further, consider a society with low GNH, in which people are time-poor, unhealthy, have a degraded environment, are alienated from their own cultural traditions, lack adequate education or decent governance, and so on. Readers whose view of happiness centers on positive experiences may note that such a society would not be a pleasant place to live. Readers whose view of happiness centers on preference satisfaction may note that in a low GNH society, people are not likely to be having the sorts of lives they truly want. And readers who see happiness as an objectively flourishing human life may note that a low GNH society is unlikely to do well by any eudaimonic standards. In general, the nine domains of GNH probably contribute to happiness as most people, in most parts of the world, would see it.

We trust, then, that the present approach to GNH can be accepted by people holding a wide range of different philosophical views about happiness (Haybron and Tiberius, 2013). Operationally, everyone might agree that happiness policies must target not just mental states but also matters like health, education, community vitality and environmental quality. Because some of these items cannot be fully understood or even defined at the individual level, it makes sense to focus, not just on measures of individual happiness, but more holistically on indicators of a flourishing society. Whether one thinks of happiness as ultimately a property of individuals or of collectives, the fact remains that human functioning is highly interdependent, involving complex feedbacks between individuals and the social and physical environment. Many essential processes for happiness occur only at the collective or system-wide level. Individualists in the liberal political tradition can agree with these points just as surely as communitarians who see happiness as something that cannot be defined entirely at the individual level.

In short, the goal of the NDP is sustainable happiness: a world in which human beings and the rest of life can sustainably flourish. As the core indicators of happiness, this report proposes the nine domains of GNH. These domains are meant to provide a holistic assessment of how well nations are doing: to what extent they are happy, thriving societies.

Why happiness policy?

The basic rationale

We suspect most readers will already agree that policy should in some sense be sustainable, not undermining the world's prospects for a decent future. But why *happiness* policy? In fact this idea too should be uncontroversial: policymakers can either take account of the impacts of their policies on happiness, or ignore them. We take it to be obvious that policymakers should consider whether their decisions make people better or worse off. To disregard such information is, indeed, irresponsible. Yet taking account of such information, if only for the purpose of avoiding policies that make people worse off, is all that happiness policy requires. Happiness policy is, in principle, a perfectly respectable and legitimate, indeed morally necessary, enterprise.

The neglect of happiness in economics and philosophy

Why, then, has happiness not played a more visible role in policy over recent decades? Part of the answer lies in the way philosophers and economists have tended to think about policy. At some level, economic approaches to policy have always been concerned with happiness, since economists have typically adopted *welfarist* approaches to policy: ultimately, the goal of policy is to promote welfare or happiness (Hausman, 2012). Early economists generally saw happiness as a mental state. But this view fell out of favor primarily because of positivist and behaviorist doubts about the possibility of measuring any mental states. So, for most of the last century, economists have typically understood happiness as preference satisfaction, i.e. getting what one wants. Preferences, in turn, were seen as being revealed by behavior. Putting this together: peoples' behavior reveals what they want, and getting what one wants defines happiness, so any freely made choice gets people what they want and thus maximizes happiness. Therefore, there is no need to measure, or even talk about, mental states. The view that mental states could not be scientifically measured and hence had no place in scientific theories was once popular in all social sciences, including psychology. But this behaviorist view was gradually abandoned as more rigorous ways to measure mental states were developed. Even in economics, mental states like consumer confidence are routinely included in theories. Economics as a discipline is currently in the process of reincorporating happiness as a mental state into its models, but the tradition of defining happiness as preference satisfaction also remains strong (Adler, 2011; Dolan and White, 2007; Frey, 2008; Kahneman, 2011; Layard, 2006).

Two features of mainstream economics are particularly important for motivating the focus on economic growth (Hausman, 2012). First, people are frequently assumed to be fully informed and rational in their choices. Second, a standard assumption is that people's preferences are fully revealed by their

choices. In fact there's no saying what people prefer apart from what they have been observed to choose. (These are taken as convenient idealizations, not necessarily literal truths. Economists generally recognize that people aren't always rational or fully informed.)

Given these assumptions, it would seem that to make people better off we must give them more options. With such a view, economic growth seems like the golden road to improving human life, absolving policymakers of the responsibility to check whether their decisions actually make people happier: give people more freedom to live as they wish, and happiness will take care of itself. From this perspective, happiness policy might seem unnecessary and even harmful.

This approach to economics is not the only reason for the dominance of indicators like GDP in policy. Quite apart from economic theory, one can readily imagine a variety of reasons policymakers and voters might find it appealing to raise incomes. Human beings need little inducement to focus their attentions on money. But traditional economic theory offers the growth-centered paradigm a powerful intellectual backing.

Political philosophers, for their part, have tended to relegate happiness policy to the margins, at least outside of utilitarian circles and their relatives. A major reason for this has been the emphasis of this literature on questions of distributive justice. Many argue, for example, that justice requires limiting inequalities of resources or capabilities, since these bear on the opportunities people have to lead good lives (Rawls, 1971; Sen, 2009; Nussbaum, 2011; Lamont and Favor, 2013). But philosophers generally reject the idea that justice demands equality of happiness or well-being, arguing that it is no injustice if some fail to lead happy lives because, despite their opportunities, they have chosen badly. Be that as it may, distributive justice is only one policy consideration, and these views tend to leave open that happiness might still be a quite major policy concern. In fact they are often taken to concern only decisions about the basic structure of society, or constitutional essentials, rather than everyday policy deliberation.

Even utilitarians need not support happiness policy, since they routinely state that the best way to promote happiness is sometimes *not* to try explicitly to promote happiness (Mill, 1979; Sinnott-Armstrong, 2011). It will be a happier society, for instance, if judges follow the law instead of deciding cases based on their view of what would maximize the sum of happiness. Still, it would take some implausibly strong assumptions to maintain that we will best promote happiness by *never* taking account of it, as we explain below.

Why policy needs to focus explicitly on happiness

There are two basic reasons why policymakers need to attend directly to happiness, and not just resources, capabilities or other freedoms alone, if they are to take full account of the extent to which their policies make people better or worse off. First, people are not always rational or fully informed (Haybron, 2008). They make mistakes, often predictable mistakes, and these will diminish the benefits of their options, sometimes in ways that policymakers cannot responsibly ignore. Most Americans today enjoy unprecedented freedom to eat varied, healthy diets, for instance, and many have responded to this good fortune by eating their way to an early grave. An oft-noted possibility is that U.S. agricultural policies, by subsidizing unhealthy foods, have contributed to the present epidemics of obesity and diabetes. It is hardly courting controversy to suggest that, should policymakers discover that their actions will have the effect of crippling or killing off a sizable proportion of the population, they ought to take that information on board.

Second, many of the things that make our lives go better are not things we can meaningfully choose as individuals. Healthy communities, for instance, are an important source of happiness, and governments should at least try to avoid policies that weaken communities. An exclusive focus on individual choice will sometimes blind policymakers to important goods, like a supportive community.

Similarly, collective action problems can undermine the individual pursuit of happiness: individually rational choices do not always add up to a collectively rational whole. Many environmental problems are like this, most acutely in the well-known 'tragedy of the commons' (Hardin, 1968). The atmosphere, for example, is essentially a global commons, and each person can only make a miniscule difference in greenhouse gas levels. Collective action is needed to solve this sort of problem, and wise policies to deal with it cannot simply be focused on maximizing long-term economic growth. They need to consider, among other things, what course of action will best serve long-term human happiness.

A prominent example from the happiness literature concerns positional goods: benefits that depend on a person's relative position in society, like social status (Ahuvia, 2008). Such goods are zero-sum: one person gains only if another loses. As a result, the pursuit of positional goods expends resources but does not promote happiness on a society-wide basis. So while it is easy to understand why individuals pursue positional goods, this competition can leave us worse off collectively (Layard, 2005).

It is important to recognize that governments and organizations *can't help* but make decisions that affect people's happiness. Sometimes, governments will have a reasonable idea about these effects. Must they entirely ignore this information, setting aside whether their choices will benefit people or harm them? Of course not. Yet taking account of such information is all that happiness policy requires.

While our discussion focuses on the basic case for sustainable happiness policy, we suggest that sustainable happiness should be, not just a policy consideration, but a central goal of policy, as it is in the NDP. Justice is essential, but it less a *goal* for policy than a minimal requirement of civilized behavior. We should not deprive people of their due. But when thinking about our positive aspirations, the need to be just is not by itself a very inspiring mandate. In trying to secure a not merely just but *good* society, our deliberations should arguably center on what would make life better. Will our efforts benefit those concerned? Will they contribute to the quality of life? Traditional economic indicators should continue to play a large role in policy, but the economy is properly the servant of happiness, not an end in itself. This is not a radical thought: in fact it is a fundamental tenet of mainstream economics. The NDP differs mainly in calling for a more explicit focus on the various dimensions of happiness, and emphasizing that the present good not be pursued at the expense of the future.

The compatibility of happiness and sustainability

An important challenge for the NDP is to address the perceived tensions between happiness and sustainability. These tensions relate to trade-offs between individuals and society, short-term and longer-term goods, present and future generations, and human and nonhuman welfare. On the one hand, the value of sustainability is entirely dependent on there being something worth sustaining. By contrast, happiness is not only a goal, but an ultimate value. In this sense, happiness is primary. On the other hand, the long-term risks posed by our present lifestyle and policies are grave, raising questions of bare survival for many. So it is understandable if some doubt that we need to worry very much, in this context, about the fine points of happiness. You don't need a battery of measures to know that hunger is no friend of happiness.

Yet it would be a serious mistake to think that sustainability policies must come first, only after which can we begin to think about happiness. Rather, sustainability policy must also be happiness policy. One reason was noted above: we cannot intelligibly speak of sustainability unless we have some notion of what needs to be sustained. And it would be irresponsible to limit ourselves to maintaining nothing more than bare survival. We can, and should, aim higher, sustaining not just the conditions of life, but good lives. Another reason is pragmatic: austerity measures are unappealing, and sustainability

efforts will be less effective if they are not plausibly linked with both short-term and longer-term happiness.

But how realistic is it to expect positive connections between sustainability and short-term happiness? People can, after all, benefit from unsustainable behaviours and policies (Adams, 2004). This is actually an upshot of the GNH framework's composition. Even if we build ecological resilience into the definition of happiness, the fact remains that this will only be one dimension of happiness among others. This leaves open the possibility that gains in other aspects of happiness will outweigh the losses in this dimension. In fact this is a positive feature of the framework: while people often underestimate the compatibility of happiness and sustainability, we may want to acknowledge that among the challenges facing the NDP is precisely that people sometimes benefit from ecological destruction.

That said, it is easy to overstate the tensions between short-term personal happiness and sustainability. For one thing, the most important sources of SWB, and arguably happiness as well, do not require high levels of material consumption. These include meaningful, skilled activities; a positive, healthy outlook including concern for others; a sense of security; some degree of autonomy or control in one's life; and most of all, good relationships and rewarding social interactions: family, friends, and community (Diener and Biswas-Diener, 2008; Haybron, 2013). Material affluence can help with all these things, but is not necessary (Ahuvia, 2012), and there is no reason to think that a sustainable economy cannot make them available to all people. Supportive communities and socializing with friends and family, for instance, can pay great happiness dividends without taxing the environment. In short, human happiness does not require a resource-intensive lifestyle.

As well, a more responsible and humane way of life can promote happiness for ourselves as well as others. Self-transcendence, altruism, or more plainly concern for others, has repeatedly been shown to strengthen subjective well-being (Lyubomirsky, 2007). Being conscious of our responsibilities towards future generations is one form this can take. Similarly, ecological responsibility is another form of self-transcendence that can sometimes involve foregoing short-term pleasures even as it contributes, overall, to the individual's own happiness (Nisbet, Zelenski and Murphy, 2011; Corral-Verdugo, 2012).

Because sustainability and happiness both involve so many factors and can take so many forms, it is hard to offer robust generalizations about their relationship. To see how the two imperatives could be not only compatible but mutually supporting, it will be helpful to consider a thought experiment regarding urban planning. We do not offer the example as a policy proposal, nor do we present

evidence that implementing such a policy would in fact promote sustainable happiness. (For policy recommendations, see Chapter 10, 'Community Vitality.') The point is simply to help the reader visualize how sustainability and short-term happiness might go hand in hand. Imagine, then, a municipality that decides to shift residential development from low-density suburban sprawl to a higher-density model—call it 'walkable communities.' These communities have the following features:

- Shopping and other businesses in walking distance
- Central plaza and other public gathering spaces
- Front porches
- Sidewalks
- Trees
- Parks and other green space
- Bike lanes
- Good schools
- Major employers nearby
- Good public transportation
- Low traffic

These features, let us suppose, contribute to sustainability by reducing the demands for transportation, and the higher density housing requires less infrastructure. They also contribute to community by bringing people closer to a higher number of neighbours, making it more appealing to get out and meet and interact with them. This in turn may induce residents to consume fewer resources, for a variety of reasons: if socializing is easier and more appealing, people may find shopping to be a less attractive leisure activity; they might need fewer consumer products to entertain them; electricity and fuel consumption may decline somewhat; people may share many products rather than buy duplicates of what their neighbours own; if trust in neighbours is high, then children may have more opportunities for unsupervised play that does not require expensive equipment, driving etc. Additionally, this sort of community will likely be more resilient in the face of economic shocks, as people are better positioned to help each other in times of scarcity. Similarly, because residents drive less, they will be less vulnerable to fluctuations in the price of oil. Besides the benefits of community and economic resilience, happiness might also be promoted by greater interaction with nature and higher levels of exercise. Were we to add to this list of features a shorter work week and more vacation time, the benefits would likely be multiplied, as people have greater leisure to take the time to interact with each other, again building both community and happiness, and perhaps contributing further to sustainability.

Finally, this sustainable happiness initiative might generate powerful 'felicitation feedbacks' that lead to further gains in both sustainability and happiness. Given the malleability of preferences, it is quite possible that such a living arrangement would change residents'—and other citizens', whose awareness of this community expands their own sense of possibility—preferences in a beneficial way, increasing demand for the kinds of features that this community embodies, and reducing demand for the less sustainable, low-density suburban developments that promote a more sedentary, more socially isolated existence in which an abundance of consumer products might be used to substitute for a lack of other opportunities for gratifying leisure time. Moreover, denser social networks, particularly with neighbours, might tend to discourage antisocial attitudes and behaviour, and hasten the spread of prosocial attitudes and behaviours. We should not be surprised if the residents of this community become supporters of further sustainable happiness policies. Perhaps, eventually, residents would *want* to make substantial reductions in resource usage, seeing a sustainable lifestyle not as a necessary evil, but an essential part of their happiness.

How the happiness lens changes policy

Defining values and objectives, and identifying indicators by which to assess them, are essential aspects of planning the good society. But in policy and practice, desired goods or outcomes can easily be confused with the indicators selected to represent them. Thus poverty reduction may be confused with the numbers or percentages of populations above a monetary 'poverty line', health confused with mortality rates, education confused with percentages attending or completing school, subjective well-being confused with self-reported life satisfaction, and so on. Though the measures are often very useful and practical, such mental shortcuts are regrettable because a great deal of what is good in life is hard to define and even harder to measure. This is especially true of something as broad and elusive as 'happiness'. We argue here, therefore, that more significant changes are heralded by the concept of a 'happiness lens' than just the substitution of one set of indicators for another (Thin, 2012). This approach emphasizes the process of becoming more ethically transparent (to ourselves and others) by focusing more explicit attention on values.

While the NDP can usefully include indicators of subjective well-being along with other indicators, the point is not to shift from one kind of indicator-focused reductionism to another. The point is, more broadly, to shift the terms of debate, making considerations of happiness or well-being an explicit object of public and policy deliberation. The use of this lens encourages all of us to consider whether and how the outcomes of our policies and actions will benefit present and future generations over the whole of the life course, and whether the

interactions among various activities and domains are mutually supportive or antagonistic.

For many years already, critical questions have been asked about whether economic growth is sustainable, environmentally benign, equitable, pro-poor, or otherwise socially benign. The happiness lens reminds us to ask still more searching questions about the value and sustainability of any progress indicators. Economic growth will continue to play a role, especially in contexts where growth is crucial to ending poverty. But its role must become less dominant, allowing policymakers and the public to take seriously the other ways in which happiness might be advanced. It should be broadly acceptable, and not a highly risky political move, for politicians to publicly proclaim that some of their policies will not promote economic growth, or might even reduce it compared to other alternatives. While many policies already have this feature, it is not often made explicit, and politicians frequently go to some lengths to deny it. Simply getting people to think explicitly about whether policies will serve happiness over the long haul, leading to a better quality of life and not just a higher living standard, is a crucial part of the effort.

Let's consider more concretely the happiness lens, which includes five important attitudes or perspectives (Thin, 2012):

a. **Positivity**: recognizing and learning from the sources of happiness, and promoting good life outcomes, rather than merely adequate or remedial outcomes; making our appraisals more realistic by avoiding the bias of pathologism.
b. **Empathy**: institutionalizing an interest in first-person perspectives, e.g. subjective experiences and self-evaluations, with a view to understanding and respecting people's values and views on their own conditions and well-being.
c. **Holism**: recognizing that policies and practices focused on one area of life, such as health or education, interact with the whole of people's lives, and therefore require a more holistic analysis.
d. **Lifespan perspective**: exploring how well-being differs among different cohorts and different points in the life cycle; respecting the importance of life narratives and the shape of a life.
e. **Transparency**: being more explicit about how our goals and actions lead towards happiness and other ultimate values.
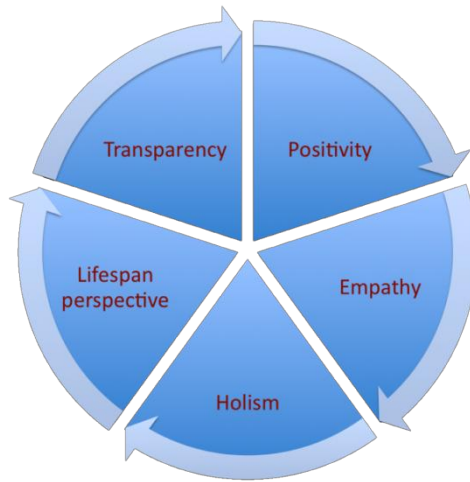
Figure 2. *The happiness lens*

Where in the policy process will the happiness lens make a difference?

As well as considering these five categories of differences that the happiness lens can make, it is also important to identify where in the policy process these attentional shifts might operate. We can use our strengthened understanding of happiness to improve the situational analysis on which we base our plans; in setting goals and developing and implementing plans for activities and processes that will get us there; in thinking through and expressing the ethical justification for those plans; and in choosing the indicators and means of assessing our contributions to happiness. Whether we are operating at global levels or simply trying to run a household, our efforts to make improvements in people's lives involve *learning, planning, justifying, doing,* and *evaluating.* Looking separately at these five aspects of the policy process is a good way of assessing whether our current approaches pay adequate heed to happiness.

	Happiness considerations
Learning	Do we understand the key sources of happiness and unhappiness in the contexts in which we are working? Do our plans consider evidence of how people are faring in various domains? Do we have a good understanding of people's priorities?
Planning	When setting objectives, is it clear how our interventions will facilitate happiness?
Justifying	Have development plans been justified to those concerned in terms of happiness dividends to current and future generations?

Doing	Are development activities organized so that, where possible, the processes are intrinsically beneficial rather than just means to some later ends?
Evaluating	In assessing policies, do indicators of progress include evidence concerning the happiness of key stakeholders? Do the means of assessment give people a meaningful chance to reflect on the different values of various aspects of development?

Table 2: *Happiness considerations in different policy processes*

Note that different aspects of the policy process may require different kinds of information, and different degrees of reliability in the measures used. At the evaluation stage, for example, policymakers might need highly reliable measures, because they require data on how specific groups of people are doing, and may only have one chance to get it right. One misleading result could result in a bad decision. At the planning stage, by contrast, we might only need general information about the causes and correlates of happiness. For this purpose, it may not matter so much if any single study is subject to significant error, because policymakers can look at the entire scientific literature on the subject. For example, when many studies using a variety of instruments converge on the conclusion that unemployment has remarkably strong effects on happiness, policymakers can be far more confident in the numbers than if they are simply looking at a single survey of their citizens. That single survey may still be quite reliable, but concerns about reliability will have less force in contexts where we don't need to put much weight on any one study, and only need general information about the sources of happiness.

Conclusion

We have not tried to defend a particular approach to sustainable happiness policy in this chapter. Rather, we have argued more modestly that such policy is both legitimate and necessary. We have also indicated some of the limitations and benefits of such an approach, and tried to clarify some of the issues that policymakers will need to confront in creating and implementing the new development paradigm. Sustainable happiness is not a radical or sectarian policy goal, but something that, in its basics, we should all be able to agree on. We hope that someday people will look back at the contemporary debate over whether to adopt such policies at all, and wonder what all the fuss was about— but be glad that we undertook it.

Appendix: Objections and replies

Is happiness policy paternalistic?

Some doubt that governments should measure and promote happiness. It is commonly objected that happiness ought to remain a private matter. The thought here is that people should be free to pursue their own good however they wish, and the state has no business getting mixed up in that endeavour, save to secure the freedoms people need to do so. Objectors raise concerns about state-sponsored 'Happiness Police' as if the mere acts of assessing trends in happiness and considering their policy implications were tantamount to a form of bullying.[3]

But for most happiness policies that have been proposed, including for the NDP, the claim is a red herring. State efforts to promote well-being need not usurp the individual's responsibility for her own welfare any more than promoting economic growth infringes on individuals' responsibilities to earn their own living. Even if it isn't the state's job to pay everyone's bills, or to ensure their happiness, it certainly is the state's job to pay some mind to what it does to its constituents' economic prospects, and how its decisions affect their welfare. This is not paternalism, but a minimal requirement of responsible governance.

Indeed, one important motivation for adopting a happiness lens in policy and governance is to *avoid* paternalism, by paying due respect to people's own values and subjective experiences (Haybron and Alexandrova, 2013). GNH, for example, tracks values that most people are known to care deeply about, and which are not always adequately addressed by traditional economic measures. If policymakers are to make policy responsive to citizens' concerns and aspirations for their lives, they need to take such information on board.

Of course, some happiness policies can, like most kinds of policy, be paternalistic. But even paternalistic policies may not always be objectionable, and most people support some kinds of paternalism, like food and drug safety regulations. We will not discuss the limits of acceptable paternalism in this document, but simply note that happiness policy is not inherently paternalistic in the least. In fact, it should be part and parcel of any nonpaternalistic approach to policy.

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[3] 'Don't ask us how happy we are Mr. Cameron... it'll only make us feel miserable,' by John Naish, *The Daily Mail*, November 16, 2010. Similarly, 'Be afraid. Here come the happiness police,' by Frank Furedi, *The Independent*, July 27, 2006.

Is sustainable happiness the sole aim of policy?

Many commentators, including classical utilitarians and their contemporary counterparts, argue that maximizing happiness—in this case understood roughly in terms of subjective well-being—is the sole legitimate end of policy, or any kind of decision making (Bentham, 1780/1969; Layard, 2005). While the NDP takes the promotion of GNH to be a central goal of policymaking, it is not committed to utilitarian doctrine, nor does it require a mental state conception of happiness or the adoption of GNH as the sole aim of policy. Governments might embrace GNH alongside other values, such as justice, rights and liberty, as well as capabilities.

In particular, the promotion of happiness must be constrained by principles of justice, a point already recognized by the commitment of GNH policy to equitable development. This is not a particularly controversial claim, and can be accepted by utilitarians and most others (Sinnott-Armstrong, 2011). Indeed it is arguably a point of consensus among moral philosophers.

Does happiness policy ignore the demands of poverty and suffering?

Although the happiness lens accentuates the positive more than some other approaches, it does not confine our attention to this any more than 'health care' should ignore the importance of curing illness. Positivity ensures that we learn from success and think about really good lives, but it doesn't prevent us from learning about harms and remedies. Any kind of happiness policy will be concerned with unhappiness, no less than happiness. Arguably, happiness policy should be more concerned with reducing unhappiness than promoting happiness, since it is widely believed that the badly-off should get higher priority than the well-off (Arneson, 2002). In short, unhappiness is at least as much a concern of happiness policy as happiness is.

A related worry is that governments might point to surveys showing positive reports of subjective well-being among their poor citizens and use this information to discount their urgent needs for assistance. That slum-dwellers in Kolkata report positive life satisfaction, for example, should not be used to conclude that they are fine and need no improvement in their living conditions (Biswas-Diener and Diener, 2001). The GNH framework used in this report substantially diminishes this problem by counting psychological well-being as only one among nine dimensions of happiness. Second, justice may demand addressing some problems of poverty, like discrimination against women, even when considerations of happiness do not. Third, it is possible for measures to overstate or understate *absolute* levels of happiness while still providing reliable information about *relative* levels of happiness (Haybron, 2008). Those worried about whether the poor are overstating their well-being might still accept the information that self-reports give about their relative welfare. This point is

important because, fourth, poor populations still tend to do *worse* than non-poor groups on subjective well-being measures even though they often report moderately high subjective well-being (Biswas-Diener, 2008; Helliwell, Layard and Sachs, 2012). Subjective well-being research makes clear that poverty tends to make life less pleasant and satisfying. Fifth, it also helpfully reminds us of human resilience, that poverty need not reduce us to mere victims living in abject misery. So subjective well-being measures, interpreted with appropriate care, do provide valuable information about the happiness impacts of poverty.

Does the NDP misuse the word 'happiness'?

No matter how people employ the word 'happiness', some will argue that they are misusing it. Many researchers, particularly in the social sciences, think it obvious that happiness is just a psychological matter. To expand the notion of happiness beyond subjective well-being, goes the objection, is to start talking about something other than happiness.[4]

But other researchers, particularly in philosophy and other humanities fields, think it obvious that 'happiness' is *not* just a psychological term, but rather a value term denoting a good or enviable life. Disagreements about happiness are not disputes about psychology, but arguments about ideals of living: what sort of life ultimately benefits a person? Those drawn to this understanding of happiness sometimes suggest that researchers who treat 'happiness' as a psychological term are misusing the language, confusing happiness with the emotion of feeling happy (Annas, 2004; Nussbaum, 2008).

More likely, both camps have a point: in contemporary English usage, 'happiness' has more than one meaning, and both uses of the term probably have some basis in ordinary language. Sometimes, as when talking about 'life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness,' or when speaking of happy *lives*, people do seem to have the broader value notion in mind. Others, as when talking about *being* happy, the term really does seem to be purely psychological. For example, American college students have been observed to judge that a person with high subjective well-being, but only because he never learned that his family and friends hated him behind his back, was nonetheless *happy*. Yet they also thought he did not lead a *happy life* (Haybron, 2008). Responses to the 'happy' question tracked his subjective well-being, while responses to the 'happy life' question tracked responses to questions like whether he had a

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[4] We do not make this objection, but note that all the authors of this chapter use 'happiness' in the psychological sense in their other work. Recent philosophers who use 'happiness' in this manner include Sumner (1996), Haybron (2008 and 2011), and Feldman (2010). These three authors use other terms like 'well-being' for what this report calls 'happiness'. Again, the difference is merely verbal.

fortunate or enviable life, flourished, or had a high level of well-being. In short, these students' usage of 'happiness' conformed to the views of *both* camps of researchers, depending on how the questions were phrased. This suggests that 'GNH' does not misuse the term 'happiness'; it simply adopts one of the major uses in the language.

While GNH does not simply identify happiness with mental states, it still accepts that good lives must include SWB. Critics of SWB research complain that it overemphasizes the value of short-lived pleasure. Yet even those who employ 'happiness' as a psychological term don't confuse it with momentary feelings. Instead they view it as a typically lasting psychological condition that might be quite rich and complex (Haybron, 2008). Writing from a Buddhist perspective, Matthieu Ricard defines happiness as "a deep sense of flourishing that arises from an exceptionally healthy mind. This is not a mere pleasurable feeling, a fleeting emotion, or a mood, but an optimal state of being" (Ricard, 2006). Even if this state of mind is not the whole of human well-being, or happiness as understood in this report, it is clearly quite important.

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