

**FINDING HAPPINESS IN WISDOM AND COMPASSION –  
THE REAL CHALLENGE FOR AN ALTERNATIVE  
DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY**

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**Abstract**

The underlying development philosophy of globalisation seeks to maximise happiness through the cultivation of a narrow materialist self-interest and competitiveness, both at the level of the individual and at the level of the nation-state. Despite voluminous evidence that this growth-fixated model of material economy polarises global well-being and seriously undermines environmental security, most, in the developed world at least, seem perfectly content to continue achieving happiness in irresponsible ways. This paper explores the deeper dynamics of an economic ideology of which GNP is only the most visible aspect and asks whether Bhutan's search for an alternative approach really entails the search for a more responsible form of happiness – one that inherently involves a more compassionate mode of being in the world. Using the Four Pillars of Gross National Happiness as a framework, it argues that the cultivation of a deeper happiness lies in ensuring that the inter-dependent realms of culture, good governance, economy and the environment remain in sustainable balance. If Buddhist understandings are accurate, then on-going happiness can only be truly found through this critical balancing. Thus, if a means for measuring the vitality of these four components can be developed then Bhutan can build a strong foundation for genuinely advancing beyond the irresponsible and unsustainable means employed by others in their search for a more fleeting form of satisfaction. But it is argued, if the maximisation of happiness at any cost is allowed to become

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the overarching goal then the errors of western development might be unintentionally replicated and Bhutan's unique potential to forge a more valuable direction be unfortunately squandered.

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The Kingdom of Bhutan has long resisted being integrated into other culture's alien systems of priorities and much of the widespread appeal of Gross National Happiness as an alternative indicator of social development comes, I believe, from an increasing appreciation throughout the world that current priorities and in particular the growth fetish of the Western economy, are misplaced and detrimental to our collective well being. That this is so is apparent when one broadens ones gaze to consider the impacts of a globalising economic ideology on the twin issues of social justice and environmental integrity. It is becoming clear that modern economic thinking, with its singular focus on maximising material consumption, is creating lamentable outcomes for many in the poorer world, for the generations that will follow us and for our fellow creatures on this planet. The dynamics of 'aid' and international trade are misallocating resources and polarising the world into an increasingly concentrated group of super-rich and a growing mass of ultra-poor. As we add another three billion people to the global family in the coming decades, this polarisation seems set to deepen with increasingly troublesome consequences for the most vulnerable regions of the planet. And at an equally fundamental level, the tyrannies of a changing climate and increasing environmental decline are set to eradicate large portions of the global ecosystem. A recent report in the conservative science journal *Nature* for example, suggests that in less than fifty years if current ideologies of growth continue to hold sway, we will cause the extinction of at least one quarter of all of the animal and plant species that currently inhabit the earth.

We find ourselves then, at a critically important juncture in human history, a point at which a profound rethinking of our

priorities is required and required urgently. It is against this larger backdrop that our meetings here this week gain some of their deeper and larger significance and Bhutan is to be commended for forging an alternative vision of how we ought to direct our energies and measure our success in this rapidly polarising and deteriorating world. I think that all here sincerely hope that Bhutan's attempts to chart a different direction for itself will be successful and be of genuine assistance in facilitating a wiser and more compassionate appreciation of our place and purpose in the world.

Having said this however, we need to recognise that this is a profoundly challenging endeavour and one that requires a considerable clarity of mind. The potential pit-falls are legion and success will depend upon patience, broad consultation and deep reflection among many other things. This paper is written above all in the hope that it might be of some assistance in the latter domain.

When I first learned of Bhutan's intention to create a measure of Gross National Happiness I was deeply impressed but I must confess to a feeling of rising foreboding as I immersed myself in the western literature on happiness and its relationship to standard models of economic development. Happiness has an intuitive appeal as an outcome of ultimate value, but the more I have read and pondered the phenomenon the less faith I have found myself having in its sole legitimacy as a primary, unqualified aim for social policy. The roots of my concern lie in an increasing appreciation that happiness can come in many forms and be derived from many courses of action and states of being – including, as I believe is the case in the privileged world, from recklessly irresponsible collective actions that deprive others of essential resources and cause extensive damage to the prospects of future generations. Ultimately, I find myself faced with a worrisome dilemma that can be summarised as follows. If happiness can be successfully found in the active exploitation of others and in the despoilation of the natural system we live within, can it constitute an acceptable measure of success?

The answer to this basic question is of the utmost importance to our current deliberations and the way we answer it will determine, at least for me, the legitimacy of happiness as a worthy arbiter of policy formation.

In personally answering this question I must say that I believe there are other outcomes that are of more importance than a simple maximisation of personal and national happiness at any cost. If for example, some find great pleasure in enacting racist values, or in stealing, the happiness that accrues does not justify the actions. Similarly, if destroying things of natural beauty, or senseless killing brings happiness, then again I do not believe that even a very high level of resultant happiness can justify such actions. It is in such instances that the potential conflict between responsibility and happiness becomes apparent. Many in the modern world achieve happiness in ways of being and consuming in the world that are profoundly unwise and I believe in such instances that this irresponsibility has to be challenged regardless of whether it brings them happiness or not. The western economy, seemingly fixated on achieving continual growth at any cost, is deeply non-compassionate, but as we shall see, it seems by standard measures at least, to be correlated with the broad generation of happiness. If we accept happiness in this form as the ultimately important outcome, such irresponsibility is forgiven, or indeed blessed, as a merely subsidiary means of achieving the all-important goal of happiness. In the process, all ethical considerations of social justice, ecological responsibility and personal duty are sacrificed in the name of an inconsiderate hedonism.

I wonder then if at heart, Bhutan's aim is not to directly cultivate a more responsible form of happiness, one that is grounded in deeper Buddhist values of enacted wisdom and compassion. If this is indeed the case, as I believe it is, then we have a much clearer agenda to build upon and a clearer distinction as to how we might conceive of a genuine advance from the unwise and heartless search for the more superficial happiness that can be gained by merely maximising material

consumption. Aiming to maximise a deeper form of happiness based on responsible being in the world seems to me to be an eminently worthy aim. Aiming to maximise a more superficial happiness based on irresponsible being in the world on the other hand, does not.

And it is exactly this distinction between responsible and irresponsible means of finding happiness that western economic culture seems to have so much difficulty discerning. In the ideology of western economy, this force which seems to inexorably dissolve alternative cultures into its sphere, happiness and economic growth have become equivalent terms, and GNP as a measure has gained its pre-eminence from this illogical equivalence. With this in mind, we should remain aware at all times that the measurement of Gross National Product is for all intents and purposes, the westernised measure of Gross National Happiness. So, in the dominant ideology of globalisation, it is not as many seem to assume, that happiness is deemed to be irrelevant to economic expansion, but rather that happiness is deemed to be equivalent to economic expansion. For the architects of modern free-market ideology any expansion in economic activity is an expansion in human happiness. But is this really the case? To answer this it is instructive to briefly consider the voluminous evidence that has been accumulated to date on the relationship between economic growth and self-reported happiness. It is interesting to note that this evidence has not been collected by economists themselves who seem little motivated to test the foundations of their assumptions. Rather, the primary evidence we have comes from the endeavours of a legion of academic psychologists who have been paying increasing attention to the relationship between the two phenomena.

Anyone who has forayed into the voluminous literature that has accumulated around the connections between economic development and self-reported happiness will be aware that there are numerous schools of thought as to the relationship between these two factors. However, the preponderant

opinion seems to be that the correlation is not nearly as simple nor compelling as some would have us believe. In order to make sense of the varying claims and counter-claims it is useful to focus on four essential relationships that ought to be strongly upheld if indeed economic growth is the major determinant of felt happiness. These are as follows.

1. At any given time looking across nations, the populations of rich countries should be clearly happier than the populations of poor countries.
2. Within any given country and across time, increases in economic growth should produce clear increases in happiness.
3. Within any given country at any given time, rich people should be clearly happier than poor people.
4. Within any given country and across time, increases in personal wealth should clearly produce increases in happiness.

By considering the evidence relating to each of these relationships we should be able to assess the degree to which economic growth does translate into increasing happiness. Let us consider each in turn.

To begin with cross-national comparisons, there is some evidence that increasing national wealth is somewhat associated with increasing happiness. In general, wealthier nations seem to be slightly happier than poor nations but this relationship is far from perfect and there are many exceptions that undermine the simple conclusion that economic growth automatically confers greater national happiness. In the most recent global study for example, the relatively poor nation of Nigeria comes out as the happiest nation, reporting far higher levels of general happiness than a great many significantly richer nations. Other anomalies point to a similar complexity - Ireland for instance seems to have a happier population than Germany despite not being as wealthy, and the Philippines report higher levels of happiness than both Japan and Taiwan (e.g. Hamilton, 2003, Inglehart, 1990). Further

caution is called for when one appreciates that the weak positive relationship that has been established breaks down after a certain level of development, with economic capacity beyond that point bringing no effective increase in national happiness (e.g. Myers, 2000, Schyns, 2000). This has led many to conclude that growing GNP is of value as a facilitator of basic need satisfaction but that once these basic requirements have been met, other non-monetary satisfactions such as meaningful work, a positive sense of purpose and close social relationships become much more important means to achieving fulfilment (e.g. Baumeister and Leary, 1995, Emmons, 1986, Myers, 2000, Perkins, 1991).

Weakening further the legitimacy of any simplistic conclusion that more money means more happiness is the mounting body of opinion that argues that wealthy nations are often also characterised by higher levels of political freedom, personal autonomy, public health, gender equality and accessible educational opportunities among other phenomena - each of which may in part explain the slightly higher levels of reported life satisfaction found across a number of studies (e.g. Eckersley, 2000, Diener and Diener, 1995. Veenhoven, 1997).

Finally, there are also a number of potent criticisms of the methodologies used to create such data including important doubts as to the validity of the various means of measuring happiness (which often involve narrow measures of personal happiness alone and exclude satisfaction with the state of society for instance) and serious questions over the representativeness of the samples used to construct the data sets (which often over-emphasise convenient samples of college students for example) (e.g. Diener and Lucas, 2000, also Veenhoven, 1996). But in conclusion, it does seem that there is a weak but far from perfect relationship between economic growth and national happiness up to a moderate level - but that this probably involves a whole nexus of factors of which national income is only one.

Turning to the evidence relating changes in economic wealth within the nation state over time to reported happiness, the data is again far from clear. However, with regard to the wealthier and more documented nations, it is quite apparent that over time, despite enormous growth in material economy, happiness does not seem to increase significantly (e.g. Myers, 2000, Oswald, 1997). This may be related to the previous observation that beyond a certain point, economic growth yields diminishing returns for felt well being. In the United States for example, where rigorous surveys have been conducted since the mid 1940s, real incomes have increased over 400% yet there has been no increase in measurable happiness. In fact if anything, there has been a slight drop in the proportion of people reporting themselves to be happy with life (Hamilton, 2003). Similarly in Japan, between the 1950s and the 1990s real GNP per person rose six fold, yet reported satisfaction with life has not changed at all. So again, considerable doubts are raised as to the veracity of any simple claim that growing economy is equivalent to growing national happiness.

Turning to the third expected relationship, which should show that within any nation state, richer people are happier than poor people, again there is no compelling evidence to show that a simple relationship obtains. In fact, the preponderance of data seems to suggest that a similar relationship exists to that between rich and poor nations. That is, gains in material riches help happiness but only to a very basic level after which no significant contribution is to be found. Thus, several studies show a difference between the very poor in society and the rest, but any clear relationships break down after this point as the moderately poor and the reasonably well off appear to be just as happy as the rich and the very rich. For instance, in studies of the richest people in America, evidence shows them to be only marginally happier than the average American - and interestingly none of the very wealthy when asked about the groundings of their happiness mention money as a major source of happiness (e.g. Argyle, 1999, Diener, Horwitz and Emmons, 1985,



Inglehart, 1990, Lykken, 1999). The relationship between personal income and happiness only seems to be of major significance in poor countries with high levels of polarisation, such as Bangladesh and India where a whole host of other contributing factors, such as severe privation and caste are likely to contribute significantly to the reported correlations (e.g. Ahuvia, 2001, Argyle, 1999).

Finally, in the context of changes in material well being as experienced by individuals over time, it is very difficult to find evidence to support the basic assumption that more money brings greater happiness. Rather over time it seems that increases in personal income beyond the level of basic need satisfaction do not produce significant increases in felt well being (e.g. Duncan, 1975, Myers, 2000). And further, even rapid changes in material circumstances seem capable only of producing rapid and very short-lived 'spikes' in felt happiness before the person returns to a basic 'set-point' of pre-existing well being (e.g. Cummings, 2000. Silver, 1982, Stone and Neale, 1984, Suh, Diener and Fujita, 1996).

In sum then, it appears that the economic assumption that equates increasing material consumption with increasing happiness is deeply flawed even in its own limited terms. Beyond a certain level, increased economic expansion does not seem to translate into increased happiness for either individuals or nation states. What linkages do appear to gain most empirical support involve the connections between economic growth and poverty. Thus, below a certain level of development, poverty eradication does make a difference. In general though, it can be reasonably concluded that Gross National Product is not the measure of Gross National Happiness it purports to be and accordingly a more applicable and discerning approach to the problem of maximising human happiness needs to be developed.

However, there is a deeper and less visible aspect of the data which has been summarised above - one that reveals a more serious flaw in the economic logic of western economics and

one that returns us to the concerns outlined at the beginning of this paper. It is as follows – although there is little compelling evidence to show that growth in economy alone produces growth in felt happiness, the fact remains that in the highly developed world, most people report being genuinely satisfied with their consumptive lives and lifestyles (e.g. Inglehart, 1990, Myers, 1993, Myers and Diener, 1996). Thus, national happiness levels remain high despite the mounting evidence that demonstrates the destructive nature of our economic priorities. In a very important sense then, the literature on happiness and its connection to the expansion of economic consumption can be read as being indicative of a willing cultural negligence within which most appear to remain happy despite the realisation that in a world of strictly limited resources, our material aspirations are deeply inappropriate in an ethical sense. Put simply, it seems that we find our happiness in diminishing the present and future well being of others in the global family.

And it is here that we can begin to discern what I believe to be the central issues underlying our current deliberations. The dominant order's happiness with negligence appears to me at least, to emanate from a basic selfishness and narrow-mindedness that has been cultivated slowly but surely throughout the history of western economic development. Viewed in this way, it is not happiness or even the equation of happiness with GNP that is the most fundamental problem, but the mode of self-indulgent being in the world that modern economic philosophy cultivates and condones. In a deeply polarised world of declining ecological health this stunted form of human non-development needs to be urgently redressed even if it does correlate with high levels of reported happiness. If we are to survive our future and achieve sustainability we need to find an equivalent happiness in much more mature conduct.

It is here then, in this context, that Buddhism offers a genuine alternative and where Bhutan's search for a different vision for development gains its greatest traction. But before

considering the positive potential of what might be developed here, it might be useful to briefly survey a few of the most important foundations that serve to support the irresponsible happiness that seems to be the aim of much of the present order. Central to all of this is the maintenance of illusion – an illusion that claims selfishness to be an acceptable or even admirable route to true happiness. This moral myopia lies at the heart of the whole cultural worldview that supports GNP as a singularly appropriate measure of collective advance.

For most of the world's cultures, untrammelled selfishness and competitiveness are appropriately viewed as unworthy and maladaptive attitudes – orientations harbouring the constant potential to endanger the larger collective interest. Accordingly most cultural systems go to great lengths to delegitimise and dis-empower them. But in western culture, these essential vices have been transformed into veritable virtues and this is particularly true within the realms of economic thought where they are praised as being of unique value in forging our collective advance towards happiness.

In order to fully appreciate the nature of this counter-intuitive belief system we must understand at least in brief form, its aetiology. Of course, there have been numerous strands that have historically come together to elevate selfishness and competitiveness beyond the realms of condemnation, but central in the process have been the inordinately influential conceptions of Adam Smith, the first and foremost articulator of free-market theory. Smith's influence has been incomparable and it was he who first formed an effective moral justification for competitive selfishness as an essential means to our collective advance. Arguing in his foundational text, known popularly as 'The Wealth of Nations', Smith noted that, ideals aside, much of humanity is motivated to action by baser instincts than generous altruism. As such he argued, if nations wish to obtain the fullest fruits of coordinated action, selfishness should be permitted a far greater freedom than it had previously been granted under the religious systems of authority that preceded the arrival of the secular western

Enlightenment. Contrary to the general conception then, Smith reframed selfishness as an enormously pro-social force, one capable of creating great good despite its amoral or immoral intentions. Thus, in his seminal outlining of free-market economics he showed how it is through selfishness and not altruism that the greatest productive energy is unleashed. It is the prospect of personal gain that drives most in society to undertake the exertions necessary to produce, market and sell the material goods and services that bring benefit to a society. It is then above all, selfishness that creates the collective wealth of nations.

But Smith understood the many tyrannies and injustices that an unbridled selfishness might bring in its wake and in his broad theorising the harmfulness of freeing up this mode was to be balanced by a countervailing force, that of competition. Again writing in the *Wealth of Nations*, he argued that competition in the marketplace would act to prevent exploitation and excessive harm as each player is forced to increasingly conform to the greater good through producing the most desired goods and services at an ever-increasing quality and an ever-decreasing price. Thus, competition would act as an 'Invisible Hand' to guide intentional selfishness towards an unintended general benefit. Those that acted with excessive greed would be forced to curtail their exploitativeness or be excluded from the marketplace. Hence, selfishness and competition working in concert would unfailingly ensure that the greatest public happiness would be obtained, at least in the material economic realm.

It is these twin notions that have formed the basic moral justification of a free-market economy ever since, one in which the least moral of motivations become blessed as a forgivable means to the valued ends of maximising national wealth and happiness. However, it needs to be pointed out that this inheritance was originally not as simplistic as it has now become in the hands of more modern economic purists. Smith's conceptions had an enormous influence partly due to their own partial truth but largely because Smith was one of

the pre-eminent moral philosophers of his age - a reputation gained through his previous writings on the Moral Sentiments. For Smith, the model of the free market within which selfishness and competition could be allowed greater reign, was premised upon his overarching belief in the power of sympathy and 'human heartedness'. Writing in the Theory of Moral Sentiments the first of his major works, he revealed a firm belief in humanity's capacity for sympathy, an emotion that prevents us tolerating excessive heartlessness in our conduct towards others. Thus, he argued, society is dominated by an over-arching human heartedness and it is this above all that will prevent selfishness from creating a morally irresponsible economy. If modes of economic action begin to create excessive exploitation or deprivation, then a prevailing sympathy will come to the fore and insist upon restraint and reparation. Needless to say, it did not take long for the rising business class to marginalise these essential assumptions and isolate the selfishness and competitiveness defended in his later work from their wiser and more compassionate roots.

With an emerging ideology that came to see selfishness as acceptable and competition as essential the modern irresponsible economy was well on its way to empowerment. An active compassion was unnecessary, as the Invisible Hand of competition would unerringly correct all injustices. And it must be noted, the potential for large-scale environmental destruction was literally unimaginable to the founders of our modern ideology living as they did in a historical epoch dominated by a sense of limitless resources and a distinctly underdeveloped capacity for their exploitation. In the selectively conceived world of Smith's cultural converts then, selfishness and competitiveness become sufficient means for forging our collective progress. There is no need for an enacted compassion or environmental wisdom, as an active irresponsibility will be magically transformed into responsible outcomes for all.

This essential faith lies at the heart of modern economic theory and it has been subsequently compounded by two equally simplistic and unwise rationalisations – the simple equation of economic activity with the satisfaction of all important human needs, and an unfortunate econometric cynicism that declares that humanity is in fact incapable of genuinely considerate or generous action. In this latter formulation the theory of human nature reaches an unfortunate dead-end in a formulation that sees being in the world as necessarily involving the rational search for maximum personal gain. The centrality of this misconception can be witnessed by consulting any introductory economic textbook where persons are formally judged to be “rational self-maximisers.” In this stunted conception, western economic thinking reaches its nadir as the potentials for genuine individual development, for compassion, self-sacrifice and intentional service are theoretically banished from the realms of possibility. With the acceptance of this anti-ideal the dominant force of globalisation moves beyond a simple moral defence of competitive selfishness, to see it as an inevitable and unavoidable condition.

In revealing these underlying assumptions, we can see clearly that the problem with GNP is not one of measurement alone, but one that involves a much deeper nexus of maladaptive beliefs. Put simply, the forces of globalisation that are knocking on the doors of Bhutan have at their heart, a series of inter-connected misconceptions. Most importantly these involve assuming that selfishness and competitiveness are morally responsible, that environmental wisdom is unnecessary, that compassion is impossible and that economic outcomes are the only ones that count towards defining collective progress. It is this combination of deep beliefs and assumptions that empowers the irresponsible happiness of the current global order. Needless to say, each of these foundational beliefs runs counter to the traditional Buddhist conception of our proper place and potential in the world.

I believe then, that we need to be quite explicit in understanding what it is that needs to be resisted if a more responsible socio-economic system is to be developed by any society including Bhutan. If a more responsible alternative is truly desired then each of the above dead-ends must be studiously guarded against. In other words, achieving a responsible Gross National Happiness must necessarily entail clearly maintaining that self-restraint and cooperativeness **are** morally responsible, that environmental wisdom **is** necessary, that compassion **is** possible and that economic outcomes **are not** the exclusive measures that count in defining our collective progress.

That the above elements are already present in Bhutanese developmental thinking is apparent in the various writings that have been produced to date and particularly in the framework that has been articulated under the heading of the Four Pillars of Gross National Happiness. In this useful conceptualisation, economic vitality becomes only one of several essential elements that together facilitate a genuine and responsible progress. Economic outcomes are tempered by active concerns for good governance, cultural vitality and environmental responsibility. A wise integration of these interconnected concerns represents a clear advance towards a more just and sustainable philosophy. And at the heart of Buddhist teaching is the central understanding that human nature reaches its greatest potential and happiness in the flowering of compassion, self-restraint and cooperation. Accordingly, the foundational principles of a living Buddhism revolve around the practicalities of achieving the wisdom and compassion of a genuinely mature human development. In a very real sense then Bhutanese Buddhism already has all of the elements in place to maintain a much more responsible social growth that in much of the world dominated as it is by the myopic ideology of a self-sufficient material competitiveness. The question is how can these elements be maximally empowered to bring to fruition comfortable and happy social existence? The answer I believe lies in finding

what might be termed a middle way between these often-conflicting priorities.

Now there is clearly much less of a need to explain the fundamentals of Buddhist social thinking to this audience than there has been to explore the depths of western economic ideology but the essential understanding that the deepest happiness can be attained only through the cultivation of a relatively selfless and non-materialist orientation deserves a clear reiteration. Unlike the secular economic conceptions of the west, the highest and deepest forms of happiness are to be found not in endless material accumulation but through moderation and a detachment from excess craving. Ultimate happiness we are told comes from a spirit of service and compassion for others and not from exploitation and carelessness towards others. And the greatest happiness entails a communion with the natural world and not a separation from it. To fail to comprehend this is, in Buddhist thinking, to live in an illusory world of false and ever-precarious happiness. It is only when this seemingly real but deeply false sense of happiness is overcome and a more responsible maturity is realised that the folly of our initial confusion is revealed. Buddhism at heart, is all about finding ways to grow beyond the illusion that a narrow, uncaring, materially grasping competitiveness can hope to bring a genuine or lasting happiness. It is then, all about challenging the unfortunately confused ideologies of material fixation at all levels not just at the most obvious level of GNP as an inappropriate indicator of our true well being.

In the classical formulations of the Four Noble Truths and of the Eightfold Path, Buddhism outlines in precise detail the means by which a compassionate, wise and ultimately happy condition might be achieved on the individual level and it is important to note that the emphasis here is upon the 'right' means to 'right' happiness. It is then a mode of being in the world that does not perceive of any practical separation of desirable ends from desirable means and in this it is clearly distinguishable from the dominant western approach to



achieving economically-derived happiness. As we have seen already, in the dominant western approach to economic development, the maximally responsible social outcome of the greatest good for the greatest number is, it is argued fully attainable only through the perfection of a maximally irresponsible mode of conduct. For Buddhism, as indeed for most of the worlds cultural systems, this disjunction between 'wrong' means and 'right' ends is absurd. If we desire the greatest potential good as an outcome, then it is only attainable through the cultivation of the greatest goodness as the means to its attainment. In other words to achieve wise and compassionate outcomes we need to cultivate wise and compassionate attitudes.

At an individual level all of this has long been understood and is quite straightforward. How to apply these understandings to social policy, particularly in light of the challenges and temptations of an insistent globalisation is a far more complex matter. But I believe the realisation of such positive outcomes including Gross National Happiness begins with the cultural empowerment of the central tenets of traditional wisdom. In other words, the profound insight that exists in Buddhist culture must retain its authority to guide social policy if a realistic balancing of the elements of a healthy economy, a just society and a sustainable environment is to be possible. This means that social governance has to be performed in light of these insights and that good governance is defined by its allegiance to, and capacity for empowering the compassionate principles that define and give value to the culture.

If Buddhist culture in Bhutan is in part characterised by an appreciation of the importance of self-restraint and balance for example, then good governance is by definition, governance conducted in a spirit of self-restraint and balance. Or if a central cultural value involves cultivating respect for the natural world, then good governance is defined by placing respect for nature at the heart of policy making. The maintenance of culturally oriented priorities is only possible if

those who have the greatest influence embody and empower the values their societies hold to be of the greatest importance and value.

In the instance of Bhutanese development then, as in the case of indigenous development anywhere, cultural vibrancy and the good governance that follows from it must be diligently monitored and constantly revitalised as the primary goal. If this is not done, as the pattern of global change worldwide amply illustrates, indigenous cultures and alternative frameworks collapse as they succumb to the dissolving anarchy of modern economic individualism and competitiveness. To vigilantly adapt and implement indigenous values is the only way to ensure cultural self-determination in the face of a dissolving globalisation that is equally determined to force their dissolution. In case after case, fragile cultural systems are replaced by alien forms of poor governance singularly oriented towards an unwise obsession with GNP and the whole nexus of troublesome assumptions it represents.

As for the other specific elements of Bhutanese development - the pillars of environmental sensibility, economic development and I would add, social justice - I believe from all that I have learned about this country that the wisdom necessary to effectively achieve balance certainly exists in the cultural values that sustain society here. This however, will involve as a primary task, the operationalisation of measures capable of accurately monitoring developments in each of these critical areas to ensure that a growing economic capacity does not, as it has elsewhere, cannibalise the equally essential realms of social justice and ecological balance. The specific criteria that will be aimed for within the realms of economic, social and cultural outcomes can only be determined by the people of Bhutan themselves and only in reference to their own distinct cultural priorities.

And so in conclusion I must return to my original concern regarding the ultimate aim of maximising and

operationalising Gross National Happiness per se. I firmly believe in Bhutan's desire to forge its own path in the modern world and not to succumb to a mindless adoption of alien priorities and I believe that a greater happiness is only attainable through such a strategy. However, I remain doubtful that an unqualified and perhaps hurried search for a maximal measurable happiness is the best first step forward. To operationalise happiness without first operationalising the foundations upon which it can rest, runs the distinct risk of minimising the importance of the right means of attaining that happiness. As is the case with any form of measurement, it can quickly become a narrowed focus that causes us to lose sight of the wisest means to its attainment. If the profound wisdom of Buddhism is correct, then the cultivation of a genuinely wise and compassionate attitude will produce a profound happiness as it has always done. Happiness then has its grounding in a respectful balancing of personal concern with the interests of others and of material concerns and the immaterial interests of personal and spiritual development. I would humbly suggest then that the Government of Bhutan put its energies at this stage into articulating the states it wishes to see obtain in each of the areas from which balanced development springs – society, culture, good governance, economy and the environment.

In the realm of the environment for example, it might be appropriate to create a set of measures related to trends in biodiversity and the well-being of critical indicator species, the sustainability of forestry, the creation of inorganic wastes, carbon dioxide emissions, water quality, cropland fertility and other such critical indicators of ecological health. In the realm of societal functioning, specific measurable criteria relating to levels of personal indebtedness, nutrition, the distribution of land, standards of housing, income polarisation, opportunities for education, population growth and access to basic healthcare might be constructive among other indicators. Similarly specific criteria can be developed to monitor the health and vitality of culture, good governance and the economy. If goals and limits can be rigorously

articulated for each of these various pillars of GNH then Bhutan can develop first and foremost, the consciously responsible form of development so badly needed by the current global order.

Once a desirable form of appropriate development has been formalised then attention can rightly shift to achieving happiness within this essential pattern of social advance. Buddhist culture has long maintained that the truest and deepest happiness comes from thinking, acting and interacting in 'right' ways – ways characterised by maturity, wisdom and compassion, and specifically not by a crass self-interested materialism. If the population as a whole can appreciate the essential rightness of being a responsible part of the global order then this can provide the ultimate sense of pride, self-respect and contentment. To facilitate the blossoming of such a collective happiness in responsibility however, there will need to be a constant re-affirmation of the truths of Buddhist teachings on compassion, moderation and respect. Equally importantly there will need to be a constant critical invalidation of the insidious ideology that would excuse un-moderated material greed and seek joy in destroying the prospects of future generations.

It is clear that Bhutan wishes to avoid the latter option and I believe the only way of avoiding succumbing to its cynicism is to set in place specific targets and measures capable of monitoring any cracks that might appear in the pillars or foundations upon which a responsible happiness rests. Following this, the cultivation of pride and happiness in what has been attained can be sought as the ultimate outcome that represents both the end and the on-going means by which its vitality is sustained. But to aim for a national happiness without first ensuring that practice reflects an essential wisdom and compassion runs the distinct risk of undermining the right conduct Buddhism has long seen as leading to the only true and worthy happiness.

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