

Development as Freedom, Freedom as Happiness: Human Development and Happiness in Bhutan

JOSEPH JOHNSON

Abstract

In this paper, I will demonstrate that Bhutan's philosophy of Gross National Happiness is related to emerging ideas in the field of human development. I will first provide some real-life examples of how economic measurements such as income and GDP do not provide policy makers with sufficient information to guarantee desirable outcomes. I will then introduce some ideas such as the capability approach, capacity to aspire, and human security that may complement the Royal Government of Bhutan's attempts to operationalize GNH. The overall purpose of this paper is to recommend to the Royal Government of Bhutan that there are many theoretical tools that have been developed by experts from various disciplines and institutions that might be useful in the effort to operationalize GNH.

Where is Happiness?

An old joke tells of a drunken man down on his hands and knees underneath a streetlight in front of his house. His neighbor, seeing him in the middle of the street, asks him what he is doing. The drunkard replies, "I was unlocking the front door of my house and dropped my keys. I can't seem to find them." The neighbor, thoroughly confused, then inquires, "If you dropped your keys while unlocking your door, why are you looking for them way over here in the street?" The drunken man, irritated by his neighbor's question, looks up and slurs, "Because the light is better over here."

Unfortunately, we too often make this same mistake in our search for happiness. Afraid to fumble through the darkness where many unseen things lie, we search only in convenient and well-lit corners. Obscure concepts such as well-being, contentment and happiness are difficult to define, yet our tendency is to look in vain for them in the supposed flawless light of economic indicators.

Fortunately, the small Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan has broken this pattern. While others wander towards a well-lit glitz promising immediate pleasure, the Kingdom of Bhutan fumbles alone in the dark to find lasting human happiness. The Bhutanese leadership remains resolute in their commitment to maximize happiness despite the difficulties and dangers involved in such a project.

GNP: Where The Light is Better...

Mainstream economists have long suggested that economic growth is the surest way to increase choice and freedom and create happiness. They have for centuries believed, as did Schopenhauer, that "money alone is absolutely good because it is the abstract satisfaction of every wish... everything else can only satisfy one wish." This idea that national happiness is directly linked to material wealth has been the assumption of economic planners since Adam Smith wrote his popular book *Wealth of Nations*. We are now quite accustomed to measuring growth, progress and welfare using proxy indicators such as personal income, capital gains, and Gross National Product. It is a practice endorsed by the most influential of modern economists. One example is Alfred Marshall, considered by many to be the originator of modern economic methods, who said in his influential book *Principles of Economics*:

The steadiest motive to ordinary business work is the desire for the pay which is the material reward of work. The pay may be on its way to be spent selfishly or unselfishly, for noble or base ends; and here the variety of human nature comes into play. But the motive is supplied by a definite amount of money; and it is this definite and exact money measurement of the steadiest motives in business life, which has enabled economics far to outrun every other branch of the study of man.

Here, Marshall reveals the secret enabling economists to outrun all those limping social scientists. The formula is simple: (1) ignore everything that cannot be weighed in a balance against some objective standard; and (2) assume that all individuals are motivated only to amass more and more money. Using these hardly reliable techniques mainstream economists have supposedly developed the ability to produce "definite and exact" measurements of humanity's "steadiest motives." Although some of these economists, like Marshall, claim to make easy work of humanity's efforts to quantify human motivations, we have seen no proof that their instruments work. Can one variable cast light on all possible human desires, wishes, needs, dreams, wants, and aspirations? Bhutan is the first nation to officially say "No" and the first to challenge the idea that "Money Alone is Absolutely Good."

The Light is Better...But Nothing to See

In Vajrayana Buddhism, there is a belief that after death one's consciousness enters into a transitional space between death and rebirth. As one nears death, monks are called upon to guide the dying person's consciousness through various realms (*bardo*) and into a favorable rebirth. Some of these realms emit a warm light that attracts the consciousness. I

find it interesting that the monks encourage the dying to stay away from certain realms of light, despite their soothing and attractive glow. For the Vajrayana Buddhist, those who succumb to the soft light of these realms will regrettably return to the redundant suffering of an illusory material world. Like a moth drawn to the flickering flame of a candle, the illusion can all too quickly lead to a painful end. In a similar way, those who find the revealing light of economic instruments attractive, believing them to be fully illuminating, will never see the reality beyond their abstractions. The light provided by such a weak instrumentation cannot possibly liberate humanity from suffering and insecurity.

Numerous studies demonstrate that happiness eludes those who commit themselves wholly to the path of economic growth. For example, despite over a century of profound material growth in America, surveys show that Americans are not noticeably happier. Similarly, Japan - a country that in the short space of a few decades went from near financial ruin to tremendous affluence - has, according to studies, enjoyed no equivalent increase in levels of happiness. Economist Richard Easterlin has classified such economic conquests as "hollow victories" for they have not led to a comparable rise in human well-being.

Easterlin would undoubtedly agree with the United Nations Development Program's suggestion that "income is not the sum total of human life." In fact, anyone who has tried to buy friends, security, peace, love, truth, compassion, trust, morals, happiness or freedom, knows that there is more to life than purchasing power. This is due in part to the fact that dominant economic models based solely on material growth ignore the full range of motivating factors in human behavior. There are many things that have been shown to contribute to happiness such as social capital, health, literacy, family, and peace, but most of these slip through the accounting books. If we continue to neglect the less-perceptible motivators in favor of those that are easily measured, we might never realize our fullest human potentials. We need an economic system that opens up space for the individual to move beyond financial and material concerns to expand choice in dimensions of a non-material nature. Only an idea like GNH can create that space, and can provide the freedom for people to move beyond the misconception that money is the abstract satisfaction of every wish.

A Critique of Economic Measurements

Due in part to its efficiency, the monetary system is ubiquitous. However, what has been the effect of our trust in the system and its accompanying economic indicators? To begin, ever since free markets, physical infrastructures, and financial capital have become the measures of human progress, we have narrowed our horizons. We have been conditioned to see only the height, width, and breadth of an outdated three-dimensional world. As a result, our development paradigms ignore the

depth and diversity of the human soul. Neglect to develop this crucial fourth dimension limits modern development schemes.

JM Keynes, one of history's most respected economists, looked forward to "the day...not far off when the Economic Problem will take the back seat, and the arena of the heart and head will be ... reoccupied by our real problems - the problems of life and of human relations, of creation and behavior and religion." Keynes further clarified in the preface to his *Essays in Persuasion* that if only we could more effectively manage available resources and techniques we might be able to reduce the Economic Problem to a position of secondary importance. Believing that humans would eventually move beyond their pecuniary obsessions, he predicted some great changes in economic planning were on the way, changes that would firmly place the human in the driver's seat. Well, perhaps today is that day.

However, let us not be so quick to toss our bankcards out the window as we speed towards Gross National Happiness. We cannot deny that many nations have prospered materially underneath economic systems exclusively utilizing income as an indicator of growth. Money does not always defeat our attempts at happiness. In fact, income can contribute a great deal towards personal conceptions of well-being. Just as Abraham Maslow said, "man does not live by bread alone, unless that man has no bread." Certainly, money alone cannot make us completely happy, but it can feed us, clothe our children, put a roof over our heads, and pay the medical bills. Recent surveys such as the World Values Survey suggest that money does contribute to happiness. Up to a certain point, income very definitely influences whether or not people consider themselves happy.

Nevertheless, limits must be acknowledged. In the studies mentioned above, we can see that money is subject to the economic law of diminishing returns. As one's income increases past a certain point, there is less marginal benefit in terms of wellness. Most of these surveys show that there is no guaranteed connection between economic growth and the expansion of human development. Income alone, therefore, does not suffice as a general indicator of human well-being.

According to the UNDP, there are two reasons for this:

Income figures do not reveal the composition of income or the real beneficiaries.

People often value achievements that do not show up in measured income or growth figures.

Who Benefits?

Let me provide one example. I am a graduate student at a Buddhist monastic university in Thailand. Half of the students in my program are monks and the other half are lay people. Recently, the administration accepted scholarship applications from those students who felt were having trouble meeting their expenses. Based on a very unreliable evaluation of

financial need a number of students were awarded full-tuition scholarships, and a more fortunate few received full scholarships paying for living expenses as well as a stipend for books and other essentials. Given the administration's use of crude income assessments to the exclusion of other factors, the outcome was interesting. Of course, the majority of students receiving the scholarships were monks. If we analyze this outcome, we can see the crux of the UNDP's critique that economic indicators cannot give us the full story.

According to the Vinaya rules established by the Buddha, monks do not receive payment for their services. So, a monk has zero annual income. Therefore, when we look solely at income levels, it would seem that our monks are destitute and are in need of financial scholarships to help offset the costs of a university education. However, our income survey does not take into account other important factors. For example, in Thailand, monks do not have to pay for housing, food, transportation, and medical costs. Many monks also have private sponsors within the lay community who give "alms gifts" to help monks pay for modern conveniences such as mobile phones and laptop computers. Sometimes lay devotees even agree to cover book costs, tuition fees, as well as most daily expenses for the monks. Of course, these gifts do not show up in our survey. So, although monks in Thailand might not fare well in a survey assessing income levels, they have very few necessary expenses. In no way is it accurate to say that they are in dire financial need. They will always be fed, they will always be clothed, they will always have shelter, health care, education, and pocket money. Nevertheless, the monk will show up in most financial assessments as living in abject poverty.

What the UNDP is getting at with their critique is that the system that only looks at income is inaccurate at best and unjust at worst. The scholarship system for example was unfair to the many lay students in the program who, despite working a part-time job, may not make enough of a salary to pay the exorbitant costs of living in Bangkok. Many of them may not be able to afford healthy food, let alone insurance, transportation, books, and tuition. Even those who earn a substantial income may have financial need due to loss of employment, large family size, care costs for elderly parents, or hospital bills for sick children. When we look solely at income, we cannot determine all the expenses that one individual might have over another individual, nor can we see the perquisites that one may have that are not available to another. As we can see, income tells us nothing about how to distribute resources, because it tells us nothing about those preexisting conditions lying behind income such as social status, health, environment, physical or biological endowments, etc.

Differing Aspirations

Another problem with pecuniary indicators is manifest when we consider that individuals value different achievements. Erich Fromm explained it nicely when he said that, "the all-absorbing wish for material wealth is a need peculiar only to certain cultures... different economic conditions can create personality traits which abhor material wealth or are indifferent to it." Humans possess varying levels of perception and wisdom, and when calculating cause and effect, the result will vary from person to person according to cultivated insight and/or perspective. Utilitarian analyses encounter problems as they often assume that all individuals derive pleasure and pain from the same sources. This is false. What brings pleasure to a hedonist may bring suffering to an ascetic, and what brings pleasure to an ascetic may bring only boredom to the modern teenager. For example, we may assume that one dollar to a poor man who only eats one meal per day will have more utility than that same dollar will have for a millionaire. However, such interpersonal comparisons cannot be trusted due to the wide variety of motivations for human action. The poor man may be a Buddhist lama meditating in a cave; as he has taken a vow of poverty as a means to enhance his welfare, he has no need for money. The millionaire, on the other hand, may be a philanthropist who lives in a simple studio apartment, eats one meal a day, weaves his own clothing and donates every dollar beyond his basic needs to an underfunded medical clinic in Cambodia. Where will our dollar be of most benefit, with the poor mendicant or the millionaire? Income indicators alone cannot tell us.

We should try to make this discussion more relevant to Bhutan. Imagine a poverty assessment team entering into the largest Buddhist monastery in Bhutan. Their instruments would undoubtedly detect severe deficiencies in this community. The evaluation might lament the abject poverty of the monks, and the lack of employment and financial services. Concerned about the welfare of this community, the team might prescribe loan distribution services or savings programs. No consideration would be given to the simple fact that the monks have rejected economic concerns so that they might have more time to realize higher intellectual or spiritual goals. Obviously, their aspirations and motivations are different from the lay merchant who must provide food and education for his family. How could a poverty assessment team concerned only with income levels expect to capture the motivations of a monk, or even a layperson that chooses a life of simple self-reliance? I think we can put to rest here Marshall's claim that economic instruments can produce "definite and exact money measurements of the steadiest motives." If income indicators fail to quantify the motivations of monks and hermits, might the same be true in other situations? It is time to put new strategies to work.

Gross National Happiness: Reestablishing Happiness as the Goal

In his essay *Economic Possibilities for our Grandchildren*, published in 1930, Keynes made a number of predictions concerning our future *vis á vis* economic development. He predicted that after significant material gains were made in progressive countries, economic growth would become of marginal concern to policy makers. He anticipated that individuals within these affluent countries would start to look beyond their bank accounts for fulfillment. However, he cautioned that this transition from a growth-pursuing culture would be difficult as the "habits and instincts of the ordinary man, [have been] bred into him for countless generations." In his essay, he predicts that this transformation will be nothing short of a "general nervous breakdown." Nevertheless, "those peoples who can keep alive and cultivate the art of life will be able to enjoy the abundance when it comes."

We can see in Keynes that the idea that humanity is not a slave to economic indicators is not a recent innovation. In fact, for centuries, renegade economists have labored to extract the human soul from the unrelenting trample of the marketplace and return it to its position at the center of economic concern.

Historical Antecedents to GNH

The idea of placing nonmaterial outcomes at the center of all private and public action has been around at least since the time of the Buddha. The Buddha suggested on numerous occasions that wealth should not be measured in pecuniary terms, but rather using non-material indicators such as contentedness, mindfulness, and purity. One example is found in the *Majjhima Nikaya* where the Buddha instructed his followers that "actions, knowledge, qualities, morality and an ideal life are the gauges of a being's purity, not wealth or name."

In more recent times, when capitalism was but a few decades old, Simonde de Sismondi questioned the notion that economic growth was an end in itself. He wrote, "When one takes the increase of economic goods as the end of society, one necessarily sacrifices the end for the means. One obtains more of production, but such production is paid for dearly by the misery of the masses." Sismondi recognized that we risk unhappiness when economic growth becomes our end.

John Ruskin, a 19th century British art critic, whose writings on economics were a powerful influence on Mahatma Gandhi, felt that the science of political economy was valid only insofar as it "teaches nations to desire and labor for the things that lead to life, and which teaches them to scorn and destroy the things that lead to destruction." Ruskin wrote in one of his treatises one of the earliest hints of Gross National Happiness: "that country is richest which nourishes the greatest number of noble and happy human beings."

John Hobson was another economist who felt that our economic practices all too often “identify the desired with the desirable.” He argued, “The total process of consumption-production may contain large elements of human waste or error, in that the tastes, desires, and satisfactions which actively stimulate wealth creation may not conform to the desirable.” He summed up his frustration in one short couplet: “Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers.”

Another modern advocate of a more human approach to economic policy was economic historian RH Tawney. Like His Majesty the King of Bhutan, Tawney was of the mind that it is necessary to seek culture, learning, and spirituality before seeking material wealth. He advocated that in devising our economic policies what is needed is a purpose, a “principle of limitation” to distinguish between “what is worth doing from what is not, and settles the scale upon which what is worth doing ought to be done.”

Yes, ideas similar to GNH have been around for a long time, but they have never made it into the mainstream. Perhaps this is confirmation that although it may be easy to say we want happiness, it is not always easy to know how to go about doing it.

“Operationalize,” *Easier Said Than Done*

The discussion surrounding the operation of GNH reminds me of an article I read recently about a hospital in China. After receiving a number of complaints from patrons about the doctors and nurses being too irritable, the hospital administration instructed their staff to regularly flash smiles showing no fewer than 8-teeth. Essentially, happiness became the company policy, and a quantifiable indicator, an 8-tooth smile, was selected. After some time, a significant decrease in complaints seemed to indicate that the policy worked. By all quantitative accounts, it seemed that the hospital was experiencing an overall increase in gross happiness.

However, what really happened? What about the staff? Were they happier knowing that if they did not smile widely enough they might lose their job? What about the working conditions that made them irritable in the first place? Would a forced 8-tooth smile contribute to the happiness of an overworked, underpaid, and distressed employee? Sometimes measurable proxy indicators of happiness, such as a smile or a positive response to the question “are you happy?” masks an urgent discontent.

Obviously, those who support the GNH project have many questions to answer. We have our work cut out for us. The difficult task of operationalizing Gross National Happiness will present new challenges all along the way. Before we proceed, I would like to offer the advice of RH Tawney, who almost seems to be speaking direct words of encouragement to those involved in the GNH effort:

These are times which are not ordinary, and in such times it is not enough to follow the road. It is necessary to know where it leads and, if it

leads nowhere, to follow another. The search for another involves reflection, which is uncongenial to the bustling people who describe themselves as practical...But the practical thing for a traveler who is uncertain of his path is not to proceed with the utmost rapidity in the wrong direction: it is to consider how to find the right one.

As Tawney points out the search for another path involves serious reflection; it also requires the courage to turn around once it is realized that the wrong decision has been made. It is an exhausting process. Fortunately, extraordinary individuals unafraid of challenging the status quo have already completed much of this work. Like the *tertons*¹ of Bhutan, it is our responsibility to dig up preexisting wisdom wherever we may find it and put it to work. Let me suggest a few possible points of embarkation.

GNH and Human Development

The United Nation's Development Program (UNDP) has recently suggested that human well-being is complex and should not be reduced to one single dimension. In their 1990 Human Development Report the UNDP convincingly argues that there are numerous factors affecting one's capacity for happiness: long life, knowledge, political freedom, religion, personal security, community participation, culture, and guaranteed human rights. Indeed, to fixate on material needs at the expense of numerous others is, as the Tibetans say, a bit like "killing the yak for a kidney." Neglecting the whole to gratify immediate material desire is not wise practice.

Since our dominant economic models cannot effectively measure the multiple dimensions of human prosperity, they cannot guarantee an adequate distribution of technology, information, and wealth. As a result, significant economic growth co-exists with deplorable human depravity. Well-being depends not only upon how much money there is, but also upon how it is used. This is evident in the fact that there are wealthy nations (just as there are wealthy individuals) which do not enjoy much comfort, security, and freedom. In turn, many less affluent nations enjoy relatively high levels of human security. For this reason, human development advocates do not measure prosperity by wealth alone but rather attempt to enhance the freedom individuals have to pursue the types of lives that they have reason to value.

Development not as Wealth, but as Freedom

According to human development advocates, the purpose of any development endeavor should not be simply to generate material wealth, but to (a) offer people more options, and (b) increase their capacity to choose from those options. Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen has said that we

¹ A "treasure-finder" in certain tantric Buddhist schools. It was the terton's responsibility to discover ancient spiritual texts (*terma*) hidden by earlier tantric adepts.

must pay attention "to the expansion of the 'capabilities' of persons to lead the kind of lives they have reason to value." Freedom to choose what one values and become fully "capacitated" in that choice is therefore the primary objective of all human development policies. In short, the basic objective of human development is to consider the multiple dimensions of human well-being and "create an enabling environment for people to enjoy long, healthy, and creative lives." I would like to suggest that these "enabling environments" should be the focus of the Royal Government of Bhutan as they move to operationalize Gross National Happiness. The larger the space, the more freedom to move; the more freedom one has, the more likely happiness will be the result.

Capabilities and Functionings

The most significant contribution of human development has been its critique of income indicators. Proponents of human development argue that instead of income, policy makers should look to "capabilities" as the relevant evaluative space. Capabilities are simply the choices and options that are available to an individual, such as the ability to learn to read and write, the ability to be employed, the ability to go to college, the ability to travel etc. It is important to remember that capability sets are simply options available to us; we can choose some and reject others. For example, a plate of food set on the table is simply a capability. It does not need to be eaten. There is a choice. However, once someone decides to eat the food, the option ceases to be a capability and becomes a realized capability, or what some call a "functioning." These functionings are the "beings and doings" that individuals have reason to value and activate, or the choices that we make from the set of capabilities that are available to us.

The difference between this approach (appropriately named the capability approach) and standard analyses is that it is not concerned with personal decisions. It does not matter whether someone decides to eat the meal or not, it is solely concerned with whether an unrestricted choice was available. In other words, we do not have to eat the meal in order to be seen by the statistician. It is the choice that matters, and it is the choice that is measured.

The importance of such distinctions may not be immediately evident. The value that the capability approach adds is in the freedom that it grants to those affected by development policies. It gives choice to people who, up until recently, never had a choice in the development process. For example, welfare programs that seek to meet basic needs usually focus on evaluations such as "caloric intake." However, what does this really tell us about the individual we are evaluating? What are they eating? What are they not eating? Why are they eating? Why are they not eating? Amartya Sen reminds us that a person with a deficiency may have made a conscious decision to be "deficient." For example, it is certain that Gandhi's caloric

intake was frighteningly low during his fast to protest the abuses of the British colonial government. His choice to fast was important to him and enhanced his well-being, despite what the evaluations show. His happiness was enhanced not by his caloric intake, but by the freedom he had to consume or not.

Amending Development Clichés

To see the problem from a different angle, let us analyze that omnipresent development cliché, “teach a man to fish, you feed him for a lifetime.” As the legend goes, several centuries ago a wise old Chinese master saw somebody handing out free fish to the hungry and poor, his response established one of the world’s first cogent development theories: “give a hungry man a fish, you feed him for a day; teach a hungry man to fish, you feed him for a lifetime.” The policy appears sound; perhaps that is why it has today become the slogan of hundreds of NGOs around the world. But, if we look at the sage’s advice from the perspective of the capability approach we sense an error. What if the man is a vegetarian? What if he is allergic to seafood? What if he is sick and cannot eat solids? What if he believes the souls of his ancestors dwell in the fishes? In short, what if he chooses not to eat fish? There are many reasons why the hungry man will benefit neither from free fish nor from instruction in how to catch fish. So imagine if our assessment of nourishment only considered how many fish one individual eats in one day. Whenever one indicator becomes the sole measurement of an individual’s welfare, we miss the larger picture, freedom and the happiness that results from self-determination. It is this problem that the capability approach attempts to resolve.

Capacity to Aspire

One of the most interesting developments to come out of the discussion on capabilities comes from Arjun Apadurai, a sociologist who has done significant work on the relationship between culture and development. In a paper to be published by the World Bank this year, Apadurai encourages us to reexamine our definitions of culture and development. Apadurai argues that we are mistaken in our perception that culture is a thing that describes only the past and present. He says that as we speak of cultures we often use words such as habit, custom, heritage, tradition or other things that denote “pastness.” Rarely do we think of culture as being something that is oriented towards the future. When we do speak of the future we often use economic or development terminology such as plans, goals, targets, and hopes. When we speak of the future of human beings we often talk of their needs or wants, expectations and calculations. The point of Apadurai’s argument is that by relegating culture to the past and economics to the future we have pitted the two against each other. According to Apadurai, this perspective supports the wrong view that culture is opposed to

development, tradition is opposed to newness, and habit is opposed to calculation. Anthropologists often blame economists for their unwillingness to consider cultural concerns, and economists blame anthropologists for their elaborate abstract models that do not respond to real-world needs. Apadurai believes that we have been crippled by these stubborn definitions. He suggests that we expand our conception of culture to include a concern for futurity. By encouraging the expansion of an individual's capacity to aspire he attempts to link culture with Sen's capability approach by establishing the future as a cultural capacity.

Understanding Aspirational Capacity

To help understand the explanatory value of Apadurai's "capacity to aspire" we can envision two artists of comparable talent and training, commissioned to paint a work of art. Artist A is given a large studio with plenty of light and fresh air. Artist B is given a cramped room in a basement with no ventilation and no natural light. Artist A is given a large canvas and a wide assortment of brushes, as well as pencils, pens, and oils in a range of colors, while artist B is given one tube of black paint and one thick matted brush. His canvas is about the size of a piece of paper. What will happen to the artists' creative vision as they are presented their workspaces? It is safe to assume that artist A, who can paint practically anything she might choose, would envision a number of possibilities. Artist B on the other hand, with only one color to work with and no room to move, is severely limited. Using Apadurai's terminology, we can say that artist A has substantial capacity to aspire, while artist B has very little aspirational capacity.

If we describe this situation using the terminology of capability analysis we can say that artist A has a broad set of capabilities to choose from. Her painting can be as minimal or as flamboyant as might be desired. It may consist of one color or 100 colors. Artist B on the other hand has limited choice. His talent will be neglected and perhaps lost as he cannot aspire to anything beyond those choices that are available to him.

Aspirational Capacity, the Capability Approach and GNH

Apadurai's work is of extreme importance to Bhutan, not only because the concept of aspirational capacity permits culture to determine the future direction of economic development, but also because it enhances the happiness of individuals. It is commonly accepted that people should have a say not only in what happens to them in the present, but also what they become. As Trungpa Rinpoche has noted, we are not only what we have done, our past karma, but we are also to a degree what we know we must do, what might be called our future karma. We are our aspirations. The more control people have to anticipate their future actions, the more secure they feel. With security comes happiness.

I would like to propose that we look at Gross National Happiness from the perspective of aspirational capacities and frontiers. Working from this perspective the RGoB would give up responsible for determining what sort of lives the Bhutanese people should live, and shift its concern to creating space for people to choose the type of lives they may have reason to value. In the case of the artist, the best environment is the one that provides the most space, and the most options. It should then be left to the individual to paint the picture. Similarly, the objective of a good government should be to create options for its constituents, and to provide space for them to move and choose. The government is no more responsible for making happy lives for its constituents than it is responsible for painting pictures for artists. Provide the space, and let the individual do the rest.

Now I must explain carefully here that I am not suggesting that Bhutan throw open her doors to let the world, with all its complexities, come flooding in. This would be irresponsible. Good governance must assume the responsibility of educating the people, and then giving them agency to choose for themselves. This is something like the bardo guide who leads the dying through the life after death, but who cannot force anyone to act against his or her will. Instead, the guide provides valuable instruction at each point in the journey past the bardo realms that will allow the individual to choose effectively. In other words, and this is endorsed by the Buddha himself, the human consciousness cannot be forced into a state of being that is not chosen or for which it is not prepared. Like this, the government must also guide its constituents through the confusion of a modern world. It must encourage the people to live in a way that will promote gross national happiness, but it must never legislate choice or action. This is a complicated process that takes time; the Bhutanese government is wise in not opening too many doors all at once.

GNH and Human Security

Human security is also a relatively new concept, but in my opinion can nevertheless contribute substantially to the effort to put GNH to work. Human security is a valuable concept that encourages policy makers to put the human individual at the center of policy matters. This is in response to the habit many nations have developed of placing state security or homeland security before the interests of human individuals. United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan has specified two areas of concern that fall within the reach of human security. The first concern is to provide *freedom from want* for all people. This means that our policies must work to liberate individuals from halting poverty and other phenomenon that deny people their basic human needs and securities. Of course, given our discussion above, it might be difficult to establish a list of “basic human needs” as these items might vary from culture to culture and from

individual to individual. But some suggestions might actually come from within a culture. For example, in a Buddhist community these needs might be defined as the four material requisites as defined by the Buddha: food, clothing, shelter and medicine. Nevertheless, all humans should have the capability to meet their basic needs. The second concern of human security is *freedom from fear*. This means that all individuals have the right to live in an environment that is free from violent conflict, social upheaval, or political disruption. It should therefore be the responsibility of all policy makers to assure that all their constituents are free from the fear of war and violence. As far as possible, humanity should be liberated from social, political and economic fears. It might help to remember here that the Buddha was very interested in devising liberation strategies to assist his followers in freeing themselves from fear, a state referred to in Buddhist texts as *abhaya*.

Linking GNH to Existing Development Concepts

The Kingdom of Bhutan stands in a unique position. As the country has not been fully absorbed into the international economic system, there is a substantial amount of space for movement. There is an incredible amount of aspirational capacity. This leaves the RGoB open to form self-determined policies that respond to the socio-economic aspirations of the Bhutanese people. It also leaves the government open to learn from, and possibly incorporate, the latest ideas from organizations such as the UNDP and the latest work from development experts.

For example, Bhutan might be the first nation to adopt human security as one of its primary policy concerns. Not only is the concept of freedom from fear and freedom from want compatible with the guiding philosophy of Gross National Happiness, but it might also provide some theoretical substance to the GNH idea. To link the two concepts would help establish some common ground between the United Nations and the government of Bhutan. This would lend a certain amount of international legitimacy to Bhutan's important, but at present lonely, pursuit of national happiness.

In addition, we can find many parallels between human development objectives and the GNH idea. Both concepts seek to remove the human individual from the confined spaces of one-dimensional indicators. Both ideas are open to a multi-dimensional evaluation of human well-being. In the capability analysis, the RGoB can find the evaluative instruments it is looking for. By enhancing the capabilities of the Bhutanese people they will become enabled to choose those functions of life that they have reason to value. This freedom of choice and movement is without question an essential component in human happiness.

Conclusion

In this paper I have attempted to show how the path illuminated by economic indicators will not lead us very far down the path to happiness.

However, the Kingdom of Bhutan's philosophy of Gross National Happiness provides us an alternative. GNH, although unable to provide a clear picture of what happiness is, can nevertheless act as a constant reminder to policy makers that happiness, and nothing else, is the goal. I have also suggested that policy makers should not be so concerned with measuring such outcomes as income, calories, positive answers to "are you happy" questions, or any other "functioning," because such obsessions strip the individual person of his or her freedom to *not* function. Although happiness cannot be measured, and perhaps should not be measured, the space wherein people can aspire towards those things that make them happy can be determined. So, I recommend that instead of measuring outcomes, policy makers should measure what Amartya Sen calls capabilities, the choices that are available to people to live lives that they have reason to value. I also recommend that instead of attempting to maximize happiness, the RGoB should work to expand the aspirational capacities of the Bhutanese people. This will ensure that freedom remains present throughout the development process.