

Psychocapital and Shangri-Las:

How happiness became both a means and end to governmentality

F. Mckay

Volume 5, No. 1 (2013) | ISSN 2161-6590 (online)
DOI 10.5195/hcs.2013.132 | <http://hcs.pitt.edu>



New articles in this journal are licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 United States License.



This journal is published by the [University Library System](#) of the [University of Pittsburgh](#) as part of its [D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program](#), and is cosponsored by the [University of Pittsburgh Press](#).

Abstract

In this paper a paradox is revealed in the politics of well-being over the means and ends of happiness. That paradox, in brief, is that although happiness is argued to be the ultimate end of all governmentality, in order to serve as that end, it first needs to be translated into a means for bolstering the economy, for only that way can a teleology of happiness gain a foothold in a world which prioritizes economic growth as an end in itself. To show this the paper gives a history of subjective well-being (SWB) research, and contrasts it with the politics of happiness in the UK, where SWB has in the past decade been translated into a discourse around the psychological wealth of the nation via the concepts of mental capital (MC) and mental well-being (MWB).

Keywords: *subjective well-being; happiness; mental well-being; mental capital.*

Psychocapital and Shangri-Las:

How happiness became both a means and end to governmentality

F. McKay

I. Introduction

On April 2nd, 2012, the United Nations held a high level meeting in New York City to discuss methods for raising happiness levels across the world. The event, entitled “Wellbeing and Happiness: Defining a New Economic Paradigm,” attracted over 800 guests, including several heads of state, numerous governmental ministers and diplomats, scientific experts from various disciplines, and spiritual authorities from several of the major world religions. The goal of the meeting: to issue an “urgent call” to nation states, and their various institutions, to help create a “new economic paradigm,” one based in well-being rather than wealth—what was generally referred to as a “gross national happiness” (GNH) (Royal Government of Bhutan, 2012, p. 92).

The UN gathering was in some sense unprecedented—the first high level meeting to govern global happiness and to do so using metrics that capture well-being within and across nations. The report that followed months later called it an “historic event” (RGB 2012, 10). But was it in fact “historic”? How did such an event come about and what were its effects? Or, considering the issue more generally, since the conference itself is symbolic of something more wide-reaching, where did this political concern with happiness come from and where is it heading? The usual answer to the first part of this question, the one given in most news reports discussing the “new economics movement,” is that it stems from a particular moment in the 1970s, when the seventeen-year-old ruler of Bhutan, King Jigme Singye Wangchuck, coined the term GNH, stating that it should be the goal of governmental policy rather than GDP, and thereby ushered in a unique commitment to happiness in international politics, setting an example for others to follow (cf. Helliwell, Layard, & Sachs, 2012, p. 7; Royal Government of Bhutan, 2012, p. 89). And the Bhutanese influence is indeed recognized today. Not only is Bhutan often said to be the first country to adopt the GNH policy seriously, even enshrining it in its constitution in 2008, but it is also Bhutan who convened the UN conference on happiness in the first place, and who brought forward the original Resolution inviting member states to pursue national happiness measures (Royal Government of Bhutan, 2012, p. 13).

Yet it is not often that seventeen-year-olds are taken seriously for defining international politics, and though Bhutan does have a role to play in popularizing the idea of GNH, it also strikes me that there is a certain orientalism creeping into the history here. This suspicion is justified, moreover, insofar as some of the “facts” about the origins of GNH are either not true, or cover up a whole history of developments in the West. If one digs a little deeper, for instance, one can find that King Jigme Singye Wangchuck did not in fact coin the term GNH, and that it

had been circulating in international politics for some time before that.¹ Moreover, if one looks at the science underpinning the development of GNH in Bhutan, one sees that most of the knowledge used to justify a politics of happiness comes largely from Western developments, particularly from the concept of “subjective well-being” (SWB), as it has been defined by European and American economists, psychologists and neuroscientists (Ura, Alkire, Zangmo, & Wangdi, 2012, pp. 73–93). Thus, SWB has been used to theorize and measure national well-being across the globe long before it was adopted in Bhutan, and it continues to define happiness studies on the large scale, providing the theoretical backing for the majority of well-being measures available in the twenty-first century.

But what is SWB exactly and where did it come from? This paper looks at that question by unearthing the history behind the concept. It does so, moreover, for two reasons: first, to dispel the orientalist assumptions of the happiness discourse, and second, to highlight the paradoxical situation in which the politics of happiness currently finds itself. Regarding the second point, there is, I argue, a tension that lies at the heart of the politics of happiness around the *means and ends* of governmentality. That tension, simply put, is that although happiness is argued to be the ultimate end of all governmentality, in order to serve as that end, it first needs to be translated into a means for bolstering the economy, for only that way can a teleology of happiness gain a foothold in the political arena, and from there replace the “old economic paradigm” of continuous economic growth. The consequence of this political maneuvering of happiness, however, is potentially destructive for the enterprise, since in the process happiness runs the risk of simply becoming another means, amongst many, for the end of the economy. Happiness, in short, risks being commoditized, something that goes counter to the spirit of the new economics agenda, which is in large measure a critique of such commoditization. Such risks, I add, are quite real, and even if one does not wish to endorse the new economics agenda in general, it is nevertheless useful to guard against those risks in order to strengthen the critique of the growth mentality.

In order to argue all this I begin, in section II, with a short history of the economics of happiness, focusing on nineteenth-century political economy and early twentieth-century neoclassical economics. There I show that, despite having a longstanding concern with happiness, both political economy and neoclassical economics ultimately took money as their domain of interest, and thus justified, over the long term, a commitment to economic growth as an end in itself. I then contrast this, in section III, with the history of SWB research, tracing its origins to public opinion polling in the post-World War II era, a moment when, for the first time in history, pollsters like George Gallup and Hadley Cantril provided quantitative methods for translating self-reports about human well-being into useable statistics of national happiness. This data was then used by economists in the 1970s to criticize the growth paradigm of neoclassical economics, and thus inspire a renewed commitment to well-being as the ultimate end of governmentality. Finally, in section IV, I turn to the contemporary application of these methods through a recent example in the UK, where SWB has in the past decade been translated into a discourse around the psychological wealth of the nation via the concepts of mental capital (MC) and mental well-being (MWB). Here I reveal a tension arising over the means and ends of government, as happiness-as-end is turned into a means for economic growth so that it can survive in a world which prioritizes wealth as an end in itself.

¹ It is frequently said King Jigme Singye Wangchuck coined the term sometime *after* he became King in July 1972. Yet, Sicco Mansholt, fourth President of the European Commission, had used the term at least as early as March 27th 1972 (“Mart Told To Ease U.S. Burden,” 1972). Moreover, it is likely that Mansholt did not coin it either, and that it more likely comes from the field of economics, perhaps the Dutch economist Tinbergen (Barber & Reed, 1973, p. 247; European Communities Press and Information Office, 1972, p. 9)

II. How Political Economy Defined Well-Being as Wealth

The economics of happiness is generally seen as beginning with a critique of the assumption that wealth is correlated with well-being (Bruni & Porta, 2007b, p. xv). The citational starting point for this critique is found in Easterlin's "Does Economic Growth Improve the Human Lot," the first article, according to Easterlin, to actually compare income levels and subjective well-being across the world (1974, p. 90). For the period 1946 to 1970, Easterlin made three findings, one of which backs up the tradition wealth-happiness link, but two of which do not: (1) when looking at a *single country* at a particular moment in time, there is a strong correlation between income and happiness (i.e., wealthy people are generally happier than poorer ones); (2) when looking at *international comparisons* at a particular moment in time, there is a weak correlation between income and happiness (i.e., wealthier countries are sometimes happier than poorer ones, but not always); and (3) when looking at one country (in this case, the U.S.) *over the long term*, there is no correlation at all (i.e., Americans have remained at the same level of happiness over the twenty-four years that data was collected even though the U.S. economy had grown by 60% during that time) (Bruni & Porta, 2007b, p. xv; Easterlin, 1974, pp. 99–111). It is the last of these that is particularly significant, suggesting, according to Easterlin, that there is something quite wrong with the traditional view that economic welfare leads to social welfare (1974, p. 121).

But why was there an assumption that wealth was correlated with well-being in the first place? Since ancient times, the general view on happiness had been that it was dependent not on money but on one's character. Arguably the highest authority on this matter was Aristotle. He argued that happiness, or eudaimonism as he called it, depended upon virtues, that is, personal qualities or excellences that allowed one to perform one's characteristic activity well (2004, p. 29). There were many such virtues for Aristotle: courage, sincerity, friendship, and patience, to name a few. One virtue in particular, however, stood out above all the others for him, namely, wisdom (2004, p. 195). What separated animals from humans, Aristotle argued, was the capacity for reason (1998, p. 214). The happiest life, then, was the contemplative life, the one in which our natural capacity for reason was pursued with the excellence of wisdom (2004, pp. 194–195).²

Eudaimonic theories were popular in Western philosophy throughout the Ancient and Medieval periods. It was not, however, until the Enlightenment, and the move towards political economy and neoclassical economics, that wealth began to eclipse virtue as the key determinant of well-being. One of the most significant contributors in this regard was Jeremy Bentham, whose approach to political economy influenced a whole generation of economists in how they conceive of, and measure, well-being.³

² Although virtue took precedent over what Aristotle called "external goods," the latter still had a role to play. One could not, after all, engage in virtuous activity without the means that made that activity possible. Thus, the contemplative life, he argued, was only possible where one had the freedom to dedicate oneself to philosophical pursuits. A certain amount of wealth was necessary, then, in order to make the seeker of the good-life self-sufficient enough so as to seriously engage in virtuous activities like contemplation (Aristotle, 2004, p. 198). As Vivenza says, "For Aristotle, exchanges and commercial activities have the sole purpose of providing for the needs and self-sufficiency of the family and of the city – nothing more. When the shortage of material goods is over, so the activity of wealth-getting must finish" (2007, p. 7).

³ Of course, Bentham is not the only person relevant to this history. I focus on him because of the continuity between his ideas and the methods developed by Gallup and Cantril. For a more thorough history of happiness in relation to political economy and economics, see McMahon (2005) and Bruni and Porta (2007a).

Happiness, Bentham argued, was nothing more than the feeling of pleasure—what he also called “utility”⁴—and all actions, including governmental ones, were to be judged according to how much pleasure they produced. Given this hedonistic approach to happiness, he needed a way of measuring the value of actions, that is, of determining specifically how much pleasure or utility was associated with an action. Only then could one be certain whether, say, a specific piece of legislation or policy intervention had actually improved happiness levels or not. He thus developed a “felicific calculus,” that is, a method for measuring well-being *quantitatively* along dimensions such as intensity, duration, certainty, propinquity, extent, and so on, in order to determine the hedonic value of any particular action (in Mill, 2003, p. 42).

Determining the value of a single action, however, was not enough by itself. Actions needed to be compared against each other, so as to determine which possessed the most utility and should therefore be chosen as a matter of policy. A comparison of utility was possible, for Bentham, for two reasons. First, it was possible because pleasures were, he thought, basically all the same—the pleasure of playing pushpin was, he famously argued, the same as the pleasure of writing a poem (Mill, 2003, p. 85). Second, comparison was also possible because of how Bentham conceived of the relation between utility and pleasure. Though he did not explicitly theorize it in these terms, Bentham’s calculus presupposes what economists today call a *cardinal* measure of well-being. This is the idea that the amount of pleasure one gets from an object or event is intrinsic to that object or event: that, in other words, the object or event gives a set amount of pleasure or happiness for everyone, all other things being equal, and that, consequently, the pleasure being ascertained can be counted as a quantity, measured along a homogenous scale, and plotted with consistent intervals between them—as is the case with things like height, weight and temperature (Screpanti & Zamagni, 2005, p. 224). Thus, the first game of pushpin gives, say, one measure of happiness for anyone playing it, a second gives two measures, a third a third, and so on. In a rather prescient move, Bentham also posited that money might be the best way to actually measure this homogeneous value. If pleasure is the satisfaction of a desire, and if a thing’s utility satisfies that desire, then it is reasonable to assume, he thought, that purchasing an object through money represents, in a numerical way, a measure of pleasure (Guidi, 2007, pp. 71–72).

Taken together, these aspects of the felicific calculus, the homogeneity of pleasures and the measure of cardinal utility through money, enabled a universal, comparative and objective science of happiness in Bentham’s view. Yet, his calculus remained subjective in its content, since pleasure was, at its base, still something known only experientially. As Guidi says, “[a]t an individual level the quality of one’s own sensibility is known by introspection” (2007, p. 73). The only thing that prevented the measure from devolving into pure subjectivity, in fact, and enabled his calculus to have some claims to universality, therefore, was the idea that utility was something that could be measured cardinally, i.e., that objects or events provided a set measure of utility to all people equally.

During the nineteenth century, many economists tried to realize the ideal set by Bentham by devising something like a felicific calculus. The marginalist economists saw themselves, in fact, as carrying on the work set by Bentham, accepting both his definition of happiness as pleasure, as well as the cardinality of utility measurements

⁴ Bentham treats happiness, pleasure and utility as virtually synonymously throughout most of his book. Technically speaking, however, utility is a property of the object that produces pleasure. As he says, utility is “that property in any object, whereby it tends to produce benefit, advantage, pleasure, good, or happiness, (all this in the present case comes to the same thing) or (what comes again to the same thing) to prevent the happening of mischief, pain, evil, or unhappiness to the party whose interest is considered” (in Mill, 2003, p. 18). In short, for Bentham, pleasure comes from utility, insofar as the usefulness of an object or event causes pleasure to us through the satisfaction of a desire or need.

(Bruni, 2007, p. 41; Royo, 2007, p. 155). With the development of welfare economics in the twentieth century, however, Bentham's psychological hedonism and cardinality came under attack. The motivation for this was part of a general positivist turn in economics. Though the marginalists had themselves tried to make economics more scientific, the problem, according to later economists, was that they still clung to certain "metaphysical" beliefs, such as psychological hedonism, which took the *feeling* of pleasure as the domain of economic measurement, and the cardinal measure of utility, which assumed an intrinsic amount of utility to objects (Bruni & Guala, 2001, p. 23).

The economist most influential in regard to the last point was Vilfredo Pareto. Motivated by the positivist spirit, he replaced the cardinal measure of utility with an *ordinal* one based in the notion of preferences instead. One did not need, he argued, to measure pleasure in the way Bentham described. Rather, all that was needed was to "*distinguish if a pleasure is greater or smaller than another,*" i.e., that there were "beings who can tell whether they derive the same pleasure from two different combinations of joy... of economic goods" (in Bruni & Guala, 2001, p. 30; emphasis added by Bruni and Guala). The "metaphysical" assumption, then, that utility was a fixed, intrinsic relation between a person and a thing could be jettisoned, according to Pareto, in favor of the simpler view that utility was simply a measure of how people ranked goods against one another according to their preferences (Screpanti & Zamagni, 2005, p. 225). One could reject cardinality, in other words, in favor of an ordinal measure, as the question was no longer "how much pleasure does an object cause?" but "is object X preferred over object Y?"

Yet even this "preference-satisfaction" view was still too "metaphysical" for some, since it relied, as Pareto acknowledged, upon the subject's awareness of their own preferences. To overcome the psychological hedonism of preference satisfaction, then, later economists, most notably Samuelson, argued that one need not invoke subjective feelings at all. Preferences, he argued, can instead be inferred from people's behavior, by noting the choices they make, especially as those choices are revealed in market activity, i.e., through consumption (Royo, 2007, p. 154). Thus, Pareto's "preference-satisfaction," which still had the specter of subjectivism attached to it, gave way to an idea of "revealed preferences," which was valued for being more "objective" and thus more fitting for the science of economics.

It is this theory of revealed preferences that provides the common interpretation of well-being in neoclassical economics today. As Frey says:

Standard economic theory employs an "objectivist" position, observing the choices made by individuals... Utility is inferred from behavior (or revealed preferences), and is in turn used to explain the choices made... Subjectivist experience... is rejected as being "unscientific," because it is not objectively observable... The axiomatic revealed preference approach holds that the choices made provide all the information required to infer the utility of outcomes (2008, p. 15).

One consequence of this view, however, is that it solidifies a link between consumption and well-being and thus influences an international faith amongst politicians in growth as a measure of happiness. As Royo says, "The revealed preferences axiom has been taken as a basis for economics to carry out macroeconomic empirical studies which *implicitly* [emphasis added] attach higher levels of well-being to increases in consumption. Consequently, economists tend to assume that as economies grow their consumption increases, and so does aggregate utility or well-being" (2007, p. 160). It thus provides "the theoretical basis for the general widespread support to endless increases in economic growth" (Royo, 2007, p. 153). The term "implicitly" in the first quote is key here. Though well-being is presupposed, to some degree, in the pursuit of economic growth by virtue of the history of utility theory, the value of money seems to have now eclipsed the original teleology of well-being, with large areas of governmental intervention focused on growing the economy as an end in itself, rather than raising well-being levels.

Evidence for this comes most explicitly from the economics and politics of happiness itself, which, in recognition of the dominance of the growth mentality, has set itself the task of reinstating happiness as the ultimate goal of global politics (Ed Diener & Seligman, 2004).

III. How Gallup and Cantril Set the Parameters for SWB Research

As noted, the economics of happiness is generally considered to have begun in the mid-1970s with Easterlin's critique of the wealth-happiness correlation. Yet where did Easterlin get his data on SWB? As he admits, he did not collect it himself, but was working with surveys that had been around since just after the Second World War and which had been collected by two of the most famous public opinion pollsters in the U.S., namely, George Gallup and Hadley Cantril.

Gallup had actually been collecting data on public opinion since the mid-1930s, measuring everything from "old-age pensions to war in Europe to the American Communist Party" (Igo, 2007, p. 120). It is unclear why, but sometime after the Second World War, he also added "avowed happiness" to his polling survey. The addition itself was fairly straightforward and consisted of just two questions (Strunk, 1946, p. 626):

"In general, how happy would you say that you are—very happy, fairly happy, or not very happy?"

"Will you tell me in your own words what the word 'happiness' means to you?"

The specific results of the survey are not important for the purposes of this paper. Rather, what is of interest is how these questions provide a new method for understanding happiness at the level of population. What Gallup achieved, in brief, was to introduce the possibility of measuring subjective well-being into economics, a possibility that had been raised by Bentham but pushed aside by the neoclassical economists. The measure was subjective in that it asked interviewees to isolate their own sentiment of happiness, evaluate it according to criteria already available in everyday language (very happy, fairly happy, not very happy), and finally to qualify that sentiment by stating what was meant by happiness in general. It was then left up to the analyst to quantify their responses.

The quantification process, however, was an act of translation that turned the inherently subjective responses of a small fraction of the population into the opinions, or rather feelings, of the general public. Up to 5,000 people were interviewed for the 1946 poll, of which 32% stated they were "very happy."⁵ This percentage, however, was meant to be representative not just of the amount interviewed, but of the total U.S. population. According to Gallup, those who were chosen for the interviews came from a cross-section of society and thus represented the American public in general. The sampling strategy thus legitimized the idea that 32% of Americans, not just those interviewed, were "very happy" in 1946.

The validity of sampling methods are fairly well established today, and the fact that Gallup was able to predict the 1936 presidential election using them only added to their validity at the time. However, some ambiguities obviously remain. If, for example, an interviewee is asked how happy he or she is, even if he or she then qualifies what is meant by happiness later, it is still unclear just *when* this experience is supposed to have occurred: does it

⁵ It is not clear how many people were polled exactly but Gallup does say that, at the time, around 1,500 to 5,000 people were generally interviewed for each poll (1948, p. 23).

mean happiness right now, during a particular occasion, or throughout one's entire life? The distinction is not made explicit. Thus, interviewee A may interpret the question as "how do you feel *right now*?" while interviewee B might interpret it as "how happy are you *in general*?" One still gets two completely different answers to the same question (even if one has defined happiness in similar ways), making interpersonal comparisons problematic. Hence, although Gallup's question on happiness is influential for being the first to measure subjective well-being, and to do so in a way that is potentially generalizable, it still lacks a certain sophistication for analyzing the different meanings of happiness. It is Hadley Cantril that is seen as providing that missing sophistication.

On first appearance, it seems that Cantril was not specifically interested in the topic of happiness, for his concern was with measuring the whole "spectrum of values a person is preoccupied or concerned with and by means of which he evaluates his own life" (1965, p. 22). Yet, this spectrum of values did take into account an idea of happiness, insofar as the values themselves were the kind of things people hoped to satisfy if they were to live a happy life. Moreover, like Gallup, Cantril also wanted to get at the subjective understanding of these interests, without sacrificing the goal of interpersonal and international comparison at the same time. As he says, "our problem has been to develop a technique which would permit us to learn about the concerns of individuals on their own terms yet in such a way that different individuals, groups of individuals, and societies could be compared in meaningful ways" (Cantril & Free, 1962, p. 1). The main method he developed in order to get at this spectrum of values was what he called the "Self-Anchoring Scale." In brief, this meant asking interviewees to define, *in their own terms*, the top and bottom anchoring points of a ten-point scale and then "to employ this *self-defined* continuum as a measuring device" (Kilpatrick & Cantril, 1960, p. 158). The literal prompt that interviewers were to use went as follows:

(A) All of us want certain things out of life. When you think about what really matters in your own life, what are your wishes and hopes for the future? In other words, if you imagine your future in the *best* possible light, what would your life look like then, if you are to be happy? Take your time in answering; such things aren't easy to put into words.

PERMISSIBLE PROBES: What are your hopes for the future? What would your life have to be like for you to be completely happy? What is missing for you to be happy? [Use also, if necessary, the words "dreams" and "desires."]

OBLIGATORY PROBE: Anything else?

(B) Now, taking the other side of the picture, what are your fears and worries about the future? In other words, if you imagine your future in the *worst* possible light, what would your life look like then? Again, take your time in answering.

PERMISSIBLE PROBE: What would make you unhappy? [Stress the words "fears" and "worries."]

OBLIGATORY PROBE: Anything else?

Here is a picture of a ladder. Suppose we say that the top of the ladder (POINTING) represents the best possible life for you and the bottom (POINTING) represents the worst possible life for you.

(C) Where on the ladder (MOVING FINGER RAPIDLY UP AND DOWN LADDER) do you feel you personally stand at the *present* time? Step number _____

(D) Where on the ladder would you say you stood *five years ago*? Step number _____

(E) And where do you think you will be on the ladder *five years from now*? Step number _____

(Cantril, 1965, pp. 23–24).

As with Gallup, the results of Cantril's questionnaire are less important than what he contributed to the science of happiness. There are three main points to make in this regard. First, Cantril reframed happiness as life satisfaction. In particular, he measured what economists today call "domain life satisfaction" and "global life satisfaction," i.e., satisfaction in regard to particular domains, like work or family life, and satisfaction with life in general (Ed Diener, 1984, pp. 545, 565). He thus made life satisfaction, rather than the ambiguous term happiness, an essential component of well-being studies.

Second, although these questions were, like Gallup's, a subjective measure that relied on the interviewee evaluating and defining happiness for themselves, Cantril inverted the order of questions. Gallup asked interviewees first to evaluate their happiness and then to define it.⁶ Cantril, by contrast, asked interviewees to define happiness first, and then to evaluate it. For Cantril, this makes sense given that he is not interested in measuring any particular value himself and instead wants to get at a subject's "spectrum of values." In that case, one needs to know what those specific values are, before they can be measured. It also counteracts, however, some of the problems in the Gallup question, which presupposed that a feeling of happiness exists prior to the understanding of it.

Thirdly, Cantril quantified the evaluation, increased the scale of measurement, and argued why such measures were generalizable. For Gallup the evaluation was based on a *qualitative* assessment of a three-category scale. With Cantril, the evaluation was a *quantitative* assessment of a ten-point scale. Such an analysis, Cantril admits, is inherently subjective. As he says, "It should be emphasized over and over again that the ratings people assign [...] themselves [...] are entirely subjective: hence a rating of, say, 6 given by one person by no means indicates the same things as a 6 given by another person" (1965, p. 25).⁷ Yet he still gave reasons for why the quantities being measured were roughly equivalent and thus amenable to interpersonal and international comparison. In short, they were interpersonally comparable, he argues, as the definitions for the best and worst lives were "similar psychologically" (Kilpatrick & Cantril, 1960, p. 161). Thus, the content of responses could be put into similar categories, and the categories themselves could then be compared.⁸ Moreover, they were internationally

⁶ It is not clear why Gallup did this but presumably it was done so as to prevent biases from entering into the results. That is, if the interviewee is first asked to define happiness, and they think money is essential to happiness, then when they are asked to evaluate their happiness levels, the question becomes, in the interviewee's mind, not "how happy am I?" but "how much money do I have." Thus, since one's definition of happiness is seen as affecting the evaluative answer one can speculate that Gallup found it more appropriate to ask the defining question last so as to obtain an answer to the evaluative question of happiness itself, and not a different one that the interviewee inferred from his definition of happiness.

⁷ The subjectivity of the evaluation is still evident in Gallup, of course, but it is obscured on account that his scale is both shorter and uses qualitative, everyday terms as a measuring device. That is, since "very happy" is a vague description of one's feeling, it is much easier to say that one person's "very happy" means pretty much the same thing as another person's "very happy," insofar as there are no specific criteria by which to distinguish one from the other. But, in truth, both Gallup and Cantril's evaluative responses are equally subjective, since it is not clear that when one person says "very happy" or "6" that this is the same feeling expressed by another person when he says "very happy" or "6." The only reason Cantril's scale foregrounds the issue more explicitly is because of the increased intervals and the use of quantification.

⁸ For instance, if one person defines one of their values as "a good living wage," while another defines theirs as "enough money to support my family," these can be grouped into the general category of "Economic stability" on account of their psychological similarity (Cantril, 1965, p. 332). The comparisons then apply to the *category* of definitions.

comparable because the questionnaires were similar linguistically. Cantril, in fact, spent much time making sure this was the case, translating the survey into twenty-six different languages, and in each case, working hard with translators to keep the translated version faithful to the original English one. As he says:

Considerable time was spent with experts to be sure the translation contained the precise nuances wanted. One of the methods often utilized in this translation process was to have someone who knew the native language, as a native, for example, an Arab, and who also was completely fluent in English translate our questions into Arabic. Then someone whose native language was English but who had a perfect command of Arabic would translate the Arabic back into English so a comparison could be made with the original question and, through discussion and further comparisons, difficulties could be ironed out (Cantril, 1965, p. 26).

From 1957-63, Cantril measured the life satisfaction of over 20,000 people in 14 countries. As with Gallup, moreover, the use of cross-section sampling methods meant that the results of these surveys were generalizable beyond that, ultimately covering a third of the world's population (Gallup, 1976, p. 459). Despite being impressed by Cantril's work, however, Gallup did not think this was enough. And so, in 1976, two years after Easterlin's groundbreaking publication, Gallup returned to measuring happiness once again, this time committed to providing a truly global science of happiness. Two key changes stand out in this move. First, he added Cantril's self-anchoring question to his own on happiness. But this time, instead of limiting himself to the countries Cantril had measured, he went further, conducting research in sixty countries, which, through the cross-section sampling technique, was understood to include two-thirds of the world's population (Gallup, 1976, p. 461). Second, he standardized the survey so as to be applicable to not just these new countries, but to any possible future ones. As he said, the "global master sample" that he devised could be used by any future government or institution interested in happiness, and it would save them the time consuming, and highly expensive process of creating a new survey for themselves (Gallup, 1976, p. 461).

After George Gallup's death in 1984, the Gallup organization continued to add to and refine their well-being poll. The most important of these changes came in 2009, when they started to measure what they called "daily well-being," that is, the balance of positive and negative affect people experience in their lives. Thus, in addition to the happiness and life satisfaction, the Gallup poll now asks two additional categories of *hedonic* questions (Agrawal & Harter, 2011, p. 4):

1. Positive Experience Index: Now, please think about yesterday, from the morning until the end of the day. Think about where you were, what you were doing, who you were with, and how you felt.
 - A. Did you feel well-rested yesterday?
 - B. Were you treated with respect all day yesterday?
 - C. Did you smile or laugh a lot yesterday?
 - D. Did you learn or do something interesting yesterday?

E. Did you experience the following feelings a lot of the day yesterday? How about enjoyment?⁹

2. Negative Experience Index: Did you experience the following feelings during a lot of the day yesterday?

How about:

A. Physical pain

B. Worry

C. Sadness

D. Stress

E. Anger

These four measures of well-being (general happiness, life/domain satisfaction and positive/negative affect) currently constitute the general category of SWB (E Diener, 2000, p. 34). More importantly, they also provide the bedrock for all the major happiness studies and Gross National Happiness indices currently available internationally and nationally. They can thus be found in such international surveys as the Gallup Poll, the World Values Survey, the European Values Survey and the European Social Survey (cf. Helliwell et al., 2012), as well as in the national statistics of SWB for Canada, France, Mexico, and the United Kingdom, amongst others (Durand & Smith, 2013, p. 132). Moreover, in each case, the wealth-happiness link has been shown to be problematic at best. The question now, then, is how are the results of surveys like these being translated into political arena?

IV. How, Despite the Critique of the Wealth-Happiness Correlation, Well-Being Became a Means for Economic Productivity

Whereas for Gallup and Cantril the issue was about how to make subjective experiences of well-being generalizable, and for the economists of happiness it was about critiquing the wealth-happiness correlation, in the UK the question has now become about how happiness is linked to the psychological wealth of the nation. Thus, happiness has become resituated in the mind, through the concept of “mental well-being” (MWB), and valued for how it contributes to economic productivity, through the concept of “mental capital” (MC).¹⁰ The argument comes largely from a report by the Government Office for Science called *Mental Capital and Well-Being*, which

⁹ The prompt does not mention which feelings for this question.

¹⁰ Mental well-being is defined as “a dynamic state, in which the individual is able to develop their potential, work productively and creatively, build strong and positive relationships with others, and contribute to their community. It is enhanced when an individual is able to fulfil their personal and social goals and achieve a sense of purpose in society” (The Government Office for Science, 2008, p. 10). Mental capital is defined as “a person’s cognitive and emotional resources. It includes their cognitive ability, how flexible and efficient they are at learning, and their “emotional intelligence”, such as their social skills and resilience in the face of stress. It therefore conditions how well an individual is able to contribute effectively to society, and also to experience a high personal quality of life” (The Government Office for Science, 2008, p. 10). Moreover, MC and MWB are related: if people are equipped with mental capital, then they will have more inner resources, more resilience, for dealing with life’s knocks and thus for possessing MWB.

synthesized the advice of “over 400 leading experts and stakeholders from across the world” and concluded that the UK government, as well as the various private institutions in the UK, should take greater care of their psychological resources (2008, p. 13). The argument can be briefly stated as follows: happier people, that is, those with higher MWB and MC, are more productive workers, and thus if one wants a stronger economy then one needs to take care of the MWB and MC of the population.

How did the discourse on SWB become translated into one of MWB and MC? Much of the argument comes from the data on mental illness in the UK. One in three families, it is said, currently suffer from some form of depression or chronic anxiety (The Center for Economic Performance’s Mental Health Policy Group, 2006, p. 1). Though it may seem obvious that illnesses like these affect SWB, insofar as they are inherently states of suffering, the point is that they are the *main* predictors of unhappiness:

When psychologists study how different types of disability affect a person’s subjective well-being, they regularly find that mental illness is the single most powerful predictor of distress. More widely, one can ask, “What is the biggest single cause of misery in our community?” Most people would answer “poverty”. But they would be wrong. If we try to predict who is unhappy we find that the strongest predictor is a person’s prior mental illness. Prior mental illness (ten years earlier) explains more current unhappiness than poverty does (The Center for Economic Performance’s Mental Health Policy Group, 2006, p. 3).¹¹

Not only, however, are depression and anxiety a problem for the people experiencing those illnesses (by virtue of the suffering they cause), but they are also a problem for the state:

We now have a million people on Incapacity Benefits because of mental illness—more than the total number of unemployed people receiving unemployment benefits. At one time unemployment was our biggest social problem, but we have done a lot to reduce it. So mental illness is now the biggest problem, and we know what to do about it (The Center for Economic Performance’s Mental Health Policy Group, 2006, p. 1).

In short, more people are absent from work, and therefore receiving benefits, due to depression and anxiety than are out of work for non-medical reasons.

The economic problem here, however, is not simply limited to the fact that unhappy people are a drain on resources. It is also about the strength and security of the UK’s economy in the future. As the report says, “Increasing numbers of workers will need to compete in a global market for skills. It will be crucial for them to develop their mental capital by training and retraining through their working years in order to compete effectively” (The Government Office for Science, 2008, p. 11). The moral is clear, then: for the UK to be a competitor in the global economy, higher forms of cognitive abilities are needed in order to build a workforce that is equipped, mentally, to take part in the marketplace of skills and ideas.

What this brief examples shows, I would argue, is two different rationales around the politics of well-being in the UK: that happiness is, on the one hand, *an end in itself*, and on the other hand, *a means* for improving the economy. Of course, one could deny any tension exists between these two logics if one accepts, following the “old

¹¹ This quote comes from the *Depression Report*, which was published two years before the *Mental Capital and Well-Being Report*. However, the results of the former are taken up in the latter and used as a justification for governing mental capital.

economic paradigm,” that improving the economy contributes to well-being. The problem, however, is that a large amount of SWB research involves a critique of that traditional assumption. Hence, the tension that runs through the MC literature is that there is a competing desire to have both the economy on the one hand, and happiness on the other, as the ultimate norms for governmentality. And the UK is not the only place where this tension plays out. Both the World Economic Forum and the Gallup Organization have taken the idea further, advocating the need to raise well-being levels in order to strengthen the economy by improving businesses’ bottom line (Agrawal & Harter, 2011; Anderson, Cooper, Layard, Litchfield, & Jane-Llopis, 2012, p. 8).

What is the cause of this tension? The answer, I would argue, is an epistemological one. As Murphy notes, the dominant form of governmentality across the globe is a biopolitical one that values and governs human life in terms of the population and the economy—what she calls “the economization of life” (Murphy, 2013, p. 142). This form of governmentality is, she argues, now a hegemonic “regime of value” and is illustrated best through the international obsession with Gross Domestic Product (2013, pp. 146, 153). For Murphy, however, this regime of value gained legitimacy through the history of a specific kind of technoscience, namely, the development of population studies, which provided the “calculative infrastructure” for the economization of life to be possible (2013, p. 144). I accept Murphy’s idea that technoscience grounds a particular kind of governmentality. The history of technoscience offered in my story, however, is that belonging to the science and politics of happiness, specifically, the development of SWB statistics by Gallup and Cantril. The tension in the politics of happiness comes, then, from the meeting of these two competing regimes of valuation in the same space of governmental reason. What can be seen, in other words, are two epistemological structures, one premised, à la Murphy, in the science of economy and population studies, and the other in the emerging science of happiness. And it is these two ways of knowing, which in the academy are able to be separated somewhat by disciplinary boundaries, that are finding themselves enmeshed when they enter the political arena, and causing the UK to adopt a strategy that is risky and at odds with their intention to reinstate well-being as the overall goal of governmental policy.

Unfortunately, those involved in bringing happiness into the political sphere are not too concerned about this approach. Any concerns they have seem to be overshadowed by the orientalism they have adopted, which provides them with a faith that a telos of happiness is possible. That is, their strategy has been to set up an Other for whom this paradox over means and ends does not exist. Thus, they have turned to the representation of a real life Shangri La (Bhutan), a place where happiness-as-end has been realized without being commoditized, and which can therefore serve as a model for the rest of the world. The orientalism of the Bhutanese story, in other words, is part of a general rhetorical solution to the tension felt over the means and ends of happiness; a solution of the sort: if Bhutan can do it, so can the rest of the world. But this rhetorical solution, I argue, does not solve the problem and, in some ways, even obscures the fact that there are consequences to the political maneuvering of happiness in terms of growth. Thus, I argue that instead of romanticizing or mythologizing happiness as an Eastern phenomenon, the politics of happiness needs a greater appreciation of the ways in which it is able to be co-opted into the growth mentality, so that it can avoid becoming just another means to economic governmentality. This is not to say one cannot continue with the political maneuvering of happiness in terms of growth as such—I suppose the strategy at least has the benefit of getting one’s voice heard—rather the point is to be more cautious about this approach, and to remain aware of how the happiness agenda can thus be used against itself, to the end of a gross materialism.

V. Conclusion

SWB research emerged in two stages. The first came during the post-World War II period, when Gallup and Cantril developed methods for measuring happiness at the level of population. The second came during the 1970s, when economists made use of Gallup and Cantril's research to critique the old economic paradigm, particularly the wealth-happiness correlation on which it rests. As that science was translated into politics in the twenty-first century, however, a paradox arose: happiness was made into a means so that it could become an end. The consequences of this political maneuvering of happiness, I argue, are potentially disastrous for the new economics approach, for in order to maintain the legitimacy of the teleology of happiness, they have to demote happiness and turn it into a means for the economy. It is not clear how this situation will pan out. One could argue that in the case of the UK, the situation seems to be a win-win: both well-being levels and the economy have the potential to be increased, something that is a benefit to both sides of the debate. I am not against this line of thinking per se, but it is a risky strategy in general, and not one guaranteed to work, especially given the power of the "old" paradigm, which tends to bend all wills to its own. In general, it is safe to say that the science and politics of happiness is a fairly new development, and so we will have to wait to see how it turns out. There are, however, reasons to be cautious about this political maneuvering of happiness from ends to means, insofar as it strengthens the economic telos, rather than the critique of it. As such I advise the well-being theorists and politicians against such a tactic, and to take greater interest in the ways in which well-being can be made handmaiden to the economy, so that they can prevent their agenda being co-opted in the future for the end of a gross materialism.

Acknowledgements

This paper would not have been possible without the help of Mary Leighton, Zoe Nyssa, Beckett Sterner and Bill Sterner. What is persuasive in the paper is due to their feedback. Thanks are also due to Alexandra Bass, Dominic Buckley, Sue Cook, Rachel Durchslag, Susan Hardy, and David Lewis. Discussions with them have been a genuine source of inspiration over the course of writing, and their general influence is stronger than they probably realize.

References

- Agrawal, S., & Harter, J. K. (2011). *Wellbeing meta-analysis*. Washington, D.C: Gallup. Retrieved from <http://www.gallup.com/strategicconsulting/157229/wellbeing-meta-analysis.aspx>
- Anderson, P., Cooper, C., Layard, R., Litchfield, P., & Jane-Llopis, E. (2012). *Well-being and global success: a report prepared by the World Economic Forum Global Agenda Council on Health & Well-being*. Switzerland: World Economic Forum. Retrieved from <http://www3.weforum.org>
- Aristotle. (1998). *The Politics*. (C. D. C. Reeve, Ed.). Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company.
- Aristotle. (2004). *Nicomachean Ethics*. (R. Crisp, Ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Barber, J. P., & Reed, B. (Eds.). (1973). *European community: Vision and reality*. London: Croom Helm.

- Bruni, L. (2007). The “technology of happiness” and the tradition of economic science. In L. Bruni & P. L. Porta (Eds.), *Handbook on the economics of happiness* (pp. 24–52). Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar.
- Bruni, L., & Guala, F. (2001). Vilfredo Pareto and the Epistemological Foundations of Choice Theory. *History of Political Economy*, 33(1), 21–49. doi:10.1215/00182702-33-1-21
- Bruni, L., & Porta, P. L. (Eds.). (2007a). *Handbook on the economics of happiness*. Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar.
- Bruni, L., & Porta, P. L. (2007b). Introduction. In L. Bruni & P. L. Porta (Eds.), *Handbook on the economics of happiness* (pp. xi–xxxvii). Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar.
- Cantril, H. (1965). *The pattern of human concerns*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Cantril, H., & Free, L. A. (1962). Hopes and fears for self and country: The self-anchoring striving scale in cross-cultural research. *American Behavioral Scientist* 6 suppl, 1–30.
- Diener, E. (2000). Subjective well-being: The science of happiness and a proposal for a national index. *The American Psychologist*, 55(1), 34–43.
- Diener, Ed. (1984). Subjective well-being. *Psychological Bulletin*, 95(3), 542–575. doi:10.1037/0033-2909.95.3.542
- Diener, Ed, & Seligman, M. E. P. (2004). Beyond money: toward an economy of well-being. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 5(1), 1–31.
- Durand, M., & Smith, C. (2013). The OECD approach to measuring subjective well-being. In J. F. Helliwell, R. Layard, & J. Sachs (Eds.), *World Happiness Report 2013* (pp. 112–137). New York: UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network.
- Easterlin, R. A. (1974). Does Economic Growth Improve the Human Lot? Some Empirical Evidence. In P. A. David & M. W. Reder (Eds.), *Nations and households in economic growth: essays in honor of Moses Abramovitz* (pp. 89–125). New York: Academic Press.
- European Communities Press and Information Office. (1972). Mansholt’s EEC environment plan. *Trade Union News from the European Community No 8*, Spring 1972, (Spring No. 8), 24.
- Frey, B. S. (2008). *Happiness: A revolution in economics*. The MIT Press.
- Gallup, G. H. (1948). *A guide to public opinion polls* (2nd ed.). Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Gallup, G. H. (1976). Human Needs and Satisfaction A Global Survey. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 40(4), 459–467. doi:10.1086/268332
- Guidi, M. E. L. (2007). Jeremy Bentham’s quantitative analysis of happiness and its asymmetries. In L. Bruni & P. L. Porta (Eds.), *Handbook on the economics of happiness* (pp. 68–94). Cheltenham, UK ; Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar.
- Helliwell, J. F., Layard, R., & Sachs, J. (2012). *World Happiness Report* (p. 158). The Earth Institute. Retrieved from <http://www.earth.columbia.edu/articles/view/2960>
- Igo, S. E. (2007). *The averaged American: surveys, citizens, and the making of a mass public*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.
- Kilpatrick, F. P., & Cantril, H. (1960). Self-anchoring scaling: A measure of individuals’ unique reality worlds. *Journal of Individual Psychology*, 16(2), 158–173.

- Mart Told To Ease U.S. Burden. (1972, March 28). *St. Petersburg Times*, p. 3–A.
- McMahon, D. M. (2005). *Happiness: a history*. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press.
- Mill, J. S. (2003). *Utilitarianism; and, On Liberty: Including Mill's Essay on Bentham, and Selections from the Writings of Jeremy Bentham and John Austin* (2nd ed.). Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub.
- Murphy, M. (2013). Economization of life: Calculative infrastructures of population and economy. In P. Rawes (Ed.), *Relational architectural ecologies: architecture, nature and subjectivity* (pp. 139–155). New York: Routledge.
- Royal Government of Bhutan. (2012). *The report of the high-level meeting on wellbeing and happiness: Defining a new economic paradigm*. New York: The Permanent Mission of the Kingdom of Bhutan to the United Nations. Retrieved from <http://www.2apr.gov.bt/images/stories/coredoc/highlevelmeeting.pdf>
- Royo, M. G. (2007). Well-being and consumption: towards a theoretical approach based on human needs satisfaction. In L. Bruni & P. L. Porta (Eds.), *Handbook on the economics of happiness* (pp. 151–169). Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar.
- Screpanti, E., & Zamagni, S. (2005). *An outline of the history of economic thought*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Strunk, M. (1946). The quarter's poll. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 10(4), 602–645.
- The Center for Economic Performance's Mental Health Policy Group. (2006). *The depression report: A new deal for depression and anxiety disorders*. London School of Economics and Political Science. Retrieved from <http://cep.lse.ac.uk/research/mentalhealth>
- The Government Office for Science. (2008). *Foresight mental capital and wellbeing project: Final project report – executive summary*. London.
- Ura, K., Alkire, S., Zangmo, T., & Wangdi, K. (2012). *A short guide to Gross National Happiness index*. Thimphu, Bhutan: The Centre for Bhutan Studies. Retrieved from <http://www.grossnationalhappiness.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Short-GNH-Index-final1.pdf>
- Vivenza, G. (2007). Happiness, wealth and utility in ancient thought. In L. Bruni & P. L. Porta (Eds.), *Handbook on the economics of happiness* (pp. 3–23). Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar.