

Towards a New Conceptualization of Gross National Happiness and its Foundations

*Dr Ross McDonald**

Introduction

As all reading this will be aware, Bhutan's development philosophy aims to increase Gross National Happiness (GNH), a worthy and highly meaningful goal and anyone choosing to work in this area will find a widespread affirmation of this 'novel' vision from almost all to whom it is mentioned. However, we would be making a serious error if we were to believe that national happiness constitutes a new goal. It has in fact been the primary goal of both Buddhist and non-Buddhist cultures for millennia and indeed it is difficult to conceive of any form of social governance which does not have this as its central spoken or unspoken goal. Even those forms of social governance which have in practice produced massive suffering (those devised by Pol Pot, Hitler and Stalin come readily to mind) sought happiness - albeit for only a select few and typically through ill-conceived ideological assumptions. Across time and space, although we might premise social progress upon seemingly differing goals, such as wealth, fame, honour, love, equality, freedom or even racial purity all such alternatives ultimately gain a common legitimacy from an assumed association with enhanced fulfilment - and their failure to produce this is always their final undoing. On an individual level, the value of happiness as a super-ordinate outcome can be revealed in simple thought experiments where we ask ourselves if we would be willing to seek money if it did not lead to happiness, or fame even if it produced

*Professor, University of Auckland, New Zealand.

personal misery. The answer is of course, a resounding no - a fact that reveals the pre-eminence of happiness in human motivation.

Indeed, the desire for happiness is central to all western philosophical traditions with the possible exception of a stern stoicism and it is readily apparent in all of the world's major religious forms where promises of bliss, joy and ecstasy draw millions of the faithful into a wide range of spiritual beliefs and practices. Thus Bhutan's development philosophy accords with long established ideals in Western secularism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Confucianism along with the vast majority of the world's indigenous 'faiths' from Africa to the Americas and from the Pacific to Asia. To seek national happiness then is nothing new but rather a long standing tradition that only appears novel to modern secular societies as a function of the obscuring impacts of a modernist paradigm that confuses the means to happiness with the end itself. As we shall see in the pages that follow, this is particularly apparent in the ideology of free market globalisation which has diluted many of the wiser traditions listed above.

But before venturing into this terrain we need to note a further and perhaps more fundamental obscuration central to modernisation and that is the critical disregard for a similarly foundational understanding common to all of the aforementioned traditions – that the achievement of widespread happiness is only possible via the prior cultivation of moral maturity.

The Practical Inseparability of Moral Development and Happiness

The inviolable connection between moral maturity and true happiness provides the intellectual foundation for almost every system of sustainable social co-ordination. In Christianity for example, the deepest fulfilment is characterised by generosity, compassion, mutual respect and the control of excessive appetites. This is readily apparent in

Towards a New Conceptualization of Gross National Happiness and its Foundations

the central core of Christian doctrine, the Ten Commandments in which progress towards collective wellbeing comes from the cultivation of these moral sensibilities and the pro-social conduct that flows spontaneously from them. Likewise, for Muslims, the Five Pillars of Islam aim to inculcate a happy morality in which charity, peacefulness, fellow-feeling and the control of selfishness are the highest and most adaptive virtues. In Confucianism, the skilful state of wu-wei is characterised by respect, sympathy, service and generosity – attitudes inseparable from happiness. In Hinduism the cultivation of upeksha, mudita, maitri and brahmacharya represent the flowering of our potential for joy and the same is thematically true for Judaism, Jainism, Sufism and of course all branches of Buddhism. Here, and particularly in Mahayana, the way to happiness lies in the simultaneous cultivation of mindful compassion and self-control. Evident in the articulation of the Four Noble Truths, the Three Roots of Evil, the Eightfold path and other insights is this central understanding that happiness demands a compassionate connection with, and contribution to the welfare of others. The same connection applies to indigenous worldviews. In Maoridom for example, a consciousness characterised by service to the collective, respect for the environment and the containment of self-seeking represents the most accomplished and fulfilling mode of being as it does in almost every indigenous culture this author is aware of. And although in some of the latter cases it might be argued that a certain warrior-like violence is condoned, this does not represent a denial of the need for moral maturity but rather (as with Pol Pot et al) a failure to extend the moral precepts to sufficiently broad and diverse constituencies.

This essential co-joining of moral improvement and progress towards both individual and collective happiness is equally central to the secular traditions that underpin the contemporary process of Western style modernisation. Aristotle for example, argued forcibly that progress towards the happiness he believed constituted the ultimate goal of

human existence, was only possible via the cultivation of moral virtue. A similar assumption underlies of all major schools of Western philosophical ethics, as in Kantian deontology for example, and is particularly explicit in that most influential of forms – utilitarianism.

For Jeremy Bentham, The so-called ‘father’ of utilitarianism, both the ultimate value of happiness and the need for a prior moral accomplishment were self-evident. In attempting to devise a rigorous ‘hedonic calculus’, he and his followers (Mill and Rawls more recently) sought to systematically identify the increases and decreases in happiness that accrue to all affected by any particular course of action. In this scheme, the relative value of action can be theoretically charted by estimating its relative utility (its ability to induce lasting, contagious and deep happiness) and dis-utility (its contrary tendency to induce lasting, contagious and deep unhappiness) in order that social action be directed towards producing “the greatest happiness for the greatest number” – exactly the goal that Bhutan has set for itself. Explicit in this endeavour is the need to found an effective progress upon the twin foundations of maximised sympathy for others and maximum self-control – in other words upon the cultivation of moral maturity.

Indeed even the great Adam Smith (that doyen of those who would deny the need for moral intentionality) clearly emphasised this same connection, a fact demonstrated by the conceptual ordering of his highly influential works. His three-volume treatise begins with the Theory of Moral Sentiments, a systematic exposition of the need for sympathy and ‘human heartedness’ if progress towards the decent society is to be secured.

All in all then, as the above sketch illustrates, not only is progress towards happiness the central aim shared by almost all social philosophies both historical and contemporary, but it is a progress utterly inseparable from the prior cultivation of self-restraint, respect and care for other constituencies.

This almost universal wisdom has however, been successively lost in the process of modernisation to be replaced by a less grounded understanding characterised by two fateful compromises. First the abandonment of happiness as the ultimate end to be sought – this being replaced by a series of subsidiary goals such as wealth and democracy. And second, the denial of any need for an intentional morality – this being replaced by a functional amorality in which progress is to be coordinated by forces beyond our own control predominantly the ‘invisible hand’ or the ‘market mechanism’. The impact of these obscurations is of tremendous importance and it is imperative that Bhutan see clearly how and why this loss of direction has come into being.

The Loss of Direction in Contemporary Globalisation

If we return to the historical roots of contemporary globalisation we can see that the predominant intention of the rational Enlightenment from which it emerged was explicitly to increase the happiness of nations through moral improvement. However, it did not take long for the integrity of this originating intent to be compromised and for the basic process of moral waywardness so characteristic of western expansion to begin. In essence the loss of direction stems directly from the rejection of an over-arching spiritual authority in the form of the Christian Church and the monolithic moral control it had exercised in European society from the fourth century onwards.

In the two centuries preceding the 18th century Enlightenment, European Christianity suffered from an almost relentless decline in legitimacy, a crisis brought on by a complex interplay of factors but centrally involving a systematic increase in corruption and hypocrisy. The increasing tendency of those high in the ranks of the Catholic Church to seek material self-aggrandisement (through the use of mortgages, the enclosure of common lands, the selling of Indulgences and so forth) and to cling to untenable scriptural ‘truths’ (concerning gravity, the movement of planets, the nature of human physiology and so on)

condemned the church to a diminishing authority. Critically also, the split between the major orders of Christianity, the Protestants and the Catholics, following Martin Luther's damning attacks on Catholic legitimacy, led to a hundred year war and a mutual derogation that left the credibility of both in irreparable ruins. Thus, by the end of the seventeenth century in Europe, religious authority had begun to wane and it was into the resulting ideological breach that the rational philosophers of the Enlightenment stepped.

These philosophers, Paine, Hutcheson, Smith, Bentham, Mill and others argued cogently that there was a need for a radical new approach to human progress and that this should be based above all upon rational appraisal and the scientific-technical improvement of society. Underlying the idealism of the age was the assumed primacy of moral improvement to individual development and the belief that this would be spontaneously forthcoming if only society could free itself from the corrupted influence of an irrational and morally compromised church. Happiness then, would be best served by facilitating personal freedom, a freedom in which individuals could decide for themselves what constituted acceptable behaviour. However, as history from that point on has clearly shown, such optimism was misplaced and without the restraining authority of a coherent institutionalised morality, individual freedom has tended easily towards neglect of others interests and the concomitant elevation of selfishness to a pre-eminent operational status. The permissive idealism inherent in Enlightenment individualism has then moved Western society away from a trajectory of rational self-improvement towards a deeply irrational culture of oblivious self-indulgence.

The aetiology of this shift is highly complex involving numerous strands of influence, but in broad outline the source of the change is easy to identify. Simply put, the moral optimism of the 18th century was undermined by the ascent of an economicistic philosophy propagated by the narrow interests of a rising commercial class primarily interested in

furthering its own material improvement. This elite managed to effectively transform the pro-social potential of Enlightenment doctrine into a compromised vision in which the cultivation of moral maturity was deemed unnecessary. This movement gained much strength from a partial reading of the key Enlightenment texts and in particular of the writings of Adam Smith. Thus, from the late Eighteenth century on, the key moral arguments of the great philosophers like Hutcheson, Smith and Bentham were selectively ignored and their theorising reshaped in order to provide justification for a much more exploitative and self-seeking agenda. Key to this shift was the *Wealth of Nations* and its proposal that an Invisible Hand would faultlessly redirect self-seeking in such a way as to provide the greatest collective happiness possible. That this argument was never truly made by Smith was, and still is, unimportant to a business class intent on seeking ideological justification for its own immaturity. Thus, the contention that enacting a rational competitiveness in which no consideration of others' well being is necessary provided the perfect cover for exploitation and self-indulgence. In a selective reading of Smith's philosophy, there is no need for intentional considerateness, generosity, respect or self-control as their opposites, inconsiderateness, meanness, disrespect and untrammelled self-indulgence will unerringly move society towards universal wellbeing via the magical mechanism of an 'Invisible Hand'. In fact, as this deeply irrational doctrine has become embedded, the claim has transformed into an even more extreme form in which the cultivation of any intentional morality is seen as being deeply disruptive to market functioning and injurious to the cause of widespread happiness.

Furthermore, modernist post-Enlightenment doctrine has come to argue that happiness itself can be effectively ignored as an outcome as it can be faultlessly replaced by more proximate measures of market scale and expansion. This revisionist tendency is again founded on disingenuous and self-serving interpretations of such key thinkers as Smith,

Bentham and David Ricardo to produce an ideology in which all market expansion indicates an equivalent expansion in satisfaction. This effective substitution of means for ends is premised upon deeply irrational assumptions, such as the belief that all market exchange is freely entered into and that there are no ecological limitations beyond which economic expansion cannot proceed without enormous cost. With these falsehoods firmly institutionalised, the architects of modern economic globalisation have forged for us all a deeply problematic trajectory.

The end result of this obscurantism has been the transformation of an integrated blue-print for simultaneous moral and material development into a morally chaotic ‘progress’ that has polarised the world into unhappy and unstable divisions of indulgent wealth and indefensible poverty. Thus, we have come to inhabit a world in which a few hundred billionaires have more wealth than the poorest 2.5 billion people combined, one in which 40,000 children die each day from preventable starvation while wealthy countries throw out 15-20% of all food as uneaten waste, and one that is likely to be witness to the destruction of up to 25% of all living species as we seek ever greater market growth. Under the current doctrine of market pre-eminence, toxic pollution is a rapidly growing problem and global food security is in steep decline driven by collapsing fish stocks, changing weather patterns and declining soil fertility. National governments’ ability to contain the amorality of market ‘integration’ is on the decline as they become increasingly captured by the commercial imperatives that further embed gross inequalities in wellbeing. Millions are being driven into privation and dependence by the compete-or-die philosophy of the worlds dominating financial institutions. And of critical importance, morally restraining cultural systems the world over are being swept away in a torrent of commercial media.

In sum then, post-Enlightenment modernity has lost its way as a direct function of its critical rejection of happiness as a conscious goal and of moral improvement as a necessary

precondition for any meaningful ‘progress’. That this is true is evident not only in the objective state of the world but more centrally in the utter futility of inconsiderate and exploitative means to securing greater happiness. Despite a dramatic acceleration in rates of material consumption in the post-war period, developed societies have achieved no significant advance towards greater national happiness. The well documented fact that greater material consumption cannot increase happiness after basic needs have been taken care of is clear testimony to the moral and practical bankruptcy of post-Enlightenment attempts to secure happiness through proxy measures and moral laxity.

Currently, Bhutan’s national development policy stands in wise opposition to this trend seeking to maintain the explicit pre-eminence of happiness as a national goal. In its current formulation, Gross National Happiness is seen to rest upon four foundations – culture, governance, the environment and economy. The above discussion would suggest however, that the real foundation of happiness is a widespread morality and that if this is indeed the case, then Bhutan’s current model is incomplete in its failure to explicitly recognise the fundamental importance of this factor in determining the subsequent quality of cultural, governmental, environmental and economic interaction. It is important that this key insight be made foundational to policy making if Bhutan is to avoid the unhappy disorientation inherent in modernity.

Towards a New Conceptualisation of Gross National Happiness

Having noted that the cultivation of moral maturity has not yet been made an explicit part of the model of GNH to date, it is nonetheless clearly evident that implicitly the connection has been made. Thus, the four pillars are typically spoken about in ways that clearly assume morality. Thus, governance denotes good and progressive governance, culture a vibrant and meaningful culture, economy a just and productive economy and the environment a healthy and sustainable environment. Essentially then, the present formulation clearly

implies that happiness is founded on morally positive relations with the four domains central to securing on-going wellbeing. The implicit inverse of this conceptualisation accordingly claims that unhappiness comes from morally negative relations in these same domains

In reality then, the four ‘pillars’ central to Bhutanese development represent overlapping domains of interaction, ones which are truly inseparable from each other, and from the broad level of moral development obtaining in a given population. With regard to the environment for example, it is clear that any population can interact with the surrounding ecological system in either responsible or irresponsible ways - ways that either recognise or fail to recognise the dependence of all on the overall health of that system and accordingly either tempers selfishness to accord with mature restraint or fails to do so. When the former orientation dominates the integral beauty of nature will be spontaneously respected, the rights of other sentient beings upheld and the on-going generativity of nature kept uppermost in considering the needs of present and future generations. Alternatively, a population can interact with the surrounding ecological system in ways that are disrespectful and exploitative leading to the integral beauty of nature being subjugated to selfish short-term interests, the rights of other sentient beings being denied and on-going generativity being undermined. The former orientation premised upon a positive morality will produce harmony and happiness in both the short and the long run, while the latter orientation will produce conflict and unhappiness both in the short and the long run.

A similar conclusion applies to each of the other three domains of interaction. Thus, for example, relationships with culture can be considerate and respectful, or they can be exploitative and disrespectful. In the former case, the beauty and meaning of Buddhist culture will be sustained by those who appreciate its positive purpose and accordingly, relationship with existing cultural forms will be healthy and contributory. Thus, traditional wisdom, ideals and

meaningful practice can be continued into the future. Alternatively, the relationship with culture can be disrespectful and exploitative leading to the denial of its relevance, legitimacy and beauty. Insights and ideals will be rejected or engaged with only for personal gain – such as in the raiding of lhakhangs and chortens and the selling of cultural treasures for financial gain. Again, the former orientation premised upon broad considerateness and self-restraint will be more productive of happiness and harmony, while the latter orientation will be produce unhappiness and conflict both in the short and long term.

In the realm of governance the same principles apply. Governance can be dominated by moral maturity leading to contributory conduct both on the part of the governed and the governing. Such a positive orientation will produce policies that are non-corrupt, inclusive and caring whereas morally immature orientations will produce the opposite outcomes - corruption, favouritism, non-responsiveness and a lack of care. Once again, moral maturity will produce greater happiness and harmony than immaturity. Similarly, with regard to the economy, persons and populations can interact in ways that are considerate and contributory or in ways that are inconsiderate and exploitative. The former will engender a spirit of contribution, providing goods and services that are of genuine value in enhancing the quality of life and doing so in ways that are respectful of the dignity and rights of workers and consumers. If driven by less mature understandings, economic action will be more likely to produce unnecessary or even harmful goods and services in unsustainable and inconsiderate ways

From the above analysis then, it should be apparent that the four interdependent domains identified in Bhutanese development policy are indeed critical to enhancing national happiness but that the determining factor is the degree of actualised morality evident in government and the population as a whole. Without broad considerateness and the containment of excessive selfishness, environmental, political,

social, cultural and economic relationships will be unhealthy and deeply harmful to the cause of national happiness.

The implications of this are clear, namely that Bhutan's developmental strategy must, as a pre-requisite priority, aim towards the cultivation of those mature, non-exploitative and unselfish attitudes upon which healthy and happy relationships with the surrounding world depend. This understanding returns us to a more grounded intuition regarding the essential inseparability of morality and widespread happiness and allows for a constructive realignment of Bhutan's current priorities with the original intent of the modernist paradigm that Bhutan now wishes to engage with.

Of Reframing our Understanding of the Four Contributory Domains Happiness

As we have seen, Bhutan's development philosophy proposes a series of four discrete domains but further clarification is in order as, in reality these do not have an equal nor independent impact on national happiness. Rather, these elements exist in a more complex and subtle relationship wherein culture constitutes the most fundamental principle – effectively shaping all decision-making relating to the other three domains of interest. This is due to the simple fact that in any human collective, direction comes most fundamentally from the values that constitute the core of that collective's shared ideals. In other words, it is the moral code inherent in culture that defines what constitutes progressive or regressive development. If a culture is dominated by ideals of sympathy and self-restraint then governance will be characterised by these same principles and will aim towards establishing social, economic and environmental policies that reflect and regenerate these considerate values. If on the other hand, a society's shared ideals come to revolve around the denial of sympathy and self-restraint, governance will be characterised by these contrary ideals and will aim towards enacting social, economic and environmental policies that reflect these deeply inconsiderate values. Culture then is not just a co-equal

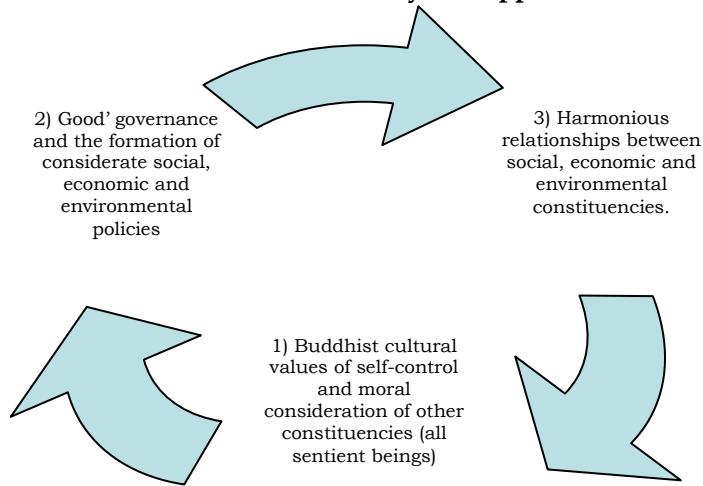
Towards a New Conceptualization of Gross National Happiness and its Foundations

factor in an adaptive pattern of development it is the critical orientation that drives the whole pattern of collective development.

The values that are enshrined in Buddhist culture must then be effectively applied by government and the degree of governmental ‘goodness’ measured by reference to its effectiveness in furthering these sovereign ideals. Thus, in Bhutan, it is government’s duty to pursue development policies that further the cultivation of widespread wisdom, compassion, sympathy, loving kindness and equanimity as an inseparable precondition for national happiness. If this can be done skilfully then development will be characterised by ecological sustainability, social harmony and economic balance but if governance succumbs to the compromised ideals of globalisation in its current form, then these relationships will instead be characterised by ecological unsustainability, social conflict and economic imbalance. If the latter were to obtain in Bhutan then governance, as measured by Buddhist ideals could not be deemed to be ‘good’.

In essence then, I propose that GNH model be reframed in accordance with the following diagram – one grounded in Buddhist morality and one that illustrates what might be termed a virtuous cycle of positive development conducive to the creation of Gross National Happiness.

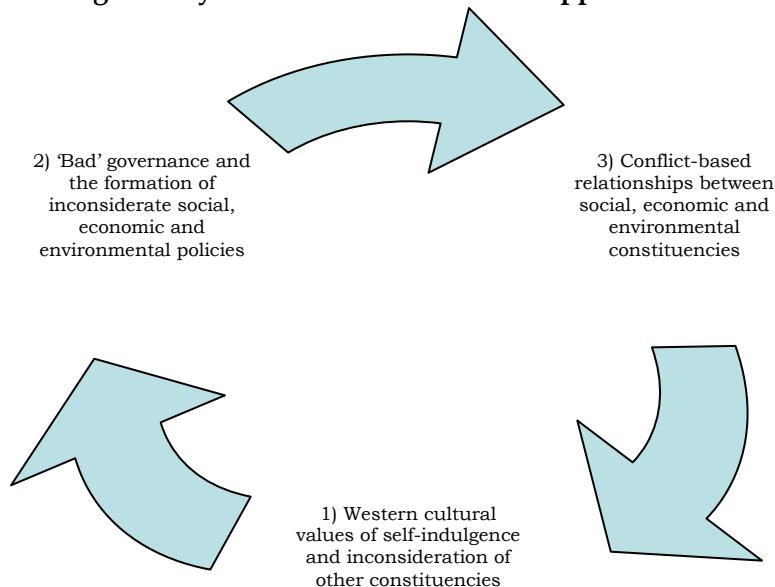
The Positive of Gross National Cycle Happiness



In the above diagram, Buddhist moral-cultural values determine government policy making in such a way that relationships with environmental, social and economic constituencies are mutually reinforcing and productive of a deep and growing national happiness. Central to this conceptualisation is the regenerative potential of such a virtuous cycle such that the direction of positive advance becomes self-reinforcing as balanced outcomes come to affirm the on-going legitimacy of existing culture – strengthening and continuing its influence on social development.

This progressive cycle can be compared with a regressive, non-virtuous cycle of development, one detrimental to the creation of national happiness. Here we see the opposite potential in which morally immature values of inconsideration and self-indulgence come to perpetuate a similarly regenerating pattern of development, but one characterised by mounting social, economic and environmental malady.

The Negative Cycle of Gross National Unhappiness



What this new conceptualisation implies is that if Bhutan is to have a reasonable chance of forging a culturally consonant pattern of genuine development, it must subject the process of modernisation to a critical analysis grounded firmly in the moral values of a considerate Buddhism. Hence, every major aspect of modernisation from media to money must be subjected to an evaluation that measures its worthiness directly in terms of its contribution to, or detraction from the moral maturity upon which sustainable happiness rests. .

The challenge then fundamentally relates to the maintenance perspective and wisdom – that most foundational of Buddhist values and the one from which all moral accomplishment stems. In its current form, economic globalisation advances a moral insensitivity that is profoundly ignorant of its own ideological confusion. The only meaningful way to counter this is through education and the maintenance of moral

clarity. So what are the implications of this for Bhutan's future? I would argue that once the foundational importance of morality is accepted that the government has little choice but to implement on-going means of public education designed to clarify the unhappy impacts of western-style modernisation and counter these with culturally consonant means to a happier development. In saying this however, I am aware immediately of how this might be received by enthusiastic modernisers both inside and outside of Bhutan who may immediately sense in this recommendation a patronising and controlling moralism. However, this perception must be challenged as it is at base, an argument for further embedding the moral chaos that is productive of so much misery in the global order. In response the question must be asked of whether the current trajectory of increasing ecological collapse and economic privation is in any way justifiable. It can indeed be argued that people ought to be free to determine their own morality, but this freedom has to operate within reasonable limits – bounded by some degree of consideration and self-control.

Ideally of course, any institutional imposition on the individual is undesirable but that is not the aim here. The point rather is to facilitate a willing acceptance of the need for self-restraint in order that the wellbeing of those beyond the furthered. This takes us to an important observation - that all human collectives need to socialise their members and inculcate those values that promote social harmony and well-being. The error often made by advocates of a purified freedom is to assume that members of modern and modernising societies can be truly free from such influence. Nothing could be further from the truth. In reality, the expansion of modern globalising culture is premised upon a highly systematic socialisation through which the values of negligent individualism are propagated. Central to this is the unstinting drive to inculcate values of material accumulation and social comparison. Commercial television, magazines, radio and above all, advertising, all constitute tremendously powerful forces intent on encouraging disconnection from the

environmental and social impacts of excessive personal consumption. It should be clear to any observer of the current order that an institutional shaping of values is very much a part of globalisation and its agenda. To deny this is simply naïve. The choice for Bhutan then is not between institutional imposition and freedom, but rather between conflicting types of institutional socialisation – one intent on forging an irresponsible sense of moral disconnection, the other intent on forging a sense of responsible moral connectedness.

So how would a more progressive Buddhist socialisation work. In essence it must accord with the main tenets of a Buddhist sensibility and particularly with the realisation that forcible imposition rarely constitutes a workable means to moral improvement. Rather, we should recall that Buddhism is explicit in its recommendation that personal development can only truly occur when practice is chosen freely and the fruits of that practice experienced in such a way that its legitimacy is realised. Thus, Buddhist morality must be made available as a framework that has much to offer individuals and communities in their own strivings for happiness and care must be taken to ensure that its wisdom is not washed away in a torrent of distraction and sub-conscious commercial socialisation.

Forging a Balanced Development in Bhutan

Over the coming years Bhutan will be challenged to balance two radically differing worldviews, an indigenous one in which self-restraint and non-accumulation lead to happiness and a foreign one in which self-indulgence and accumulation lead to happiness. In all such situations, the former can only prevail if it is institutionally facilitated and the latter institutionally contained. It has been suggested above that in order to maintain the values of a positive development, an on-going education be facilitated and I will return to the specifics of this in a moment. Firstly though, some comments on the containment of modernity's corruptions are in order.

It is well known that the major socialising effects in modern culture come from the commercial imperatives of corporations and their control of the critical media through which public ‘reality’ is shaped. In a previous paper¹, I argued that commercial television is the central mode of consumerist socialisation and that its introduction into Bhutan represents the single biggest threat to the virtuous cycle outlined above. This conclusion was based on the well-documented impacts of commercial television on community cohesion, personal appetite and moral clarity. If Bhutan genuinely wishes to forge a more constructive path to genuine happiness then it must seek to control the degenerative impact of this medium. This argument applies not only to the actual content of television programming and its celebrations of sex, violence and possessiveness but most of all to the direct manipulations of advertising. The values central to modern entertainment stands in direct opposition to Buddhist values and if these are to survive, the onslaught of televisions contrary influence must be contained in one way or another. How this might be done is a difficult issue and it is clear that Bhutanese officials are grappling with it. However, I would have to say that recent attempts to censor certain channels seem somewhat poorly targeted – taking Indian soap operas to task for example, but not ‘shoot-em-up’ American movies. I would suggest that a more simple solution be applied, one which would involve a strict limitation of the hours of broadcast, say to four hours per day. This suggestion is based upon the understanding that the most dramatic impacts of television lie in its constant absorption of the viewers attention and its ability to obviate understandings of larger, more grounding realities. The current 24 hours of multi-channel broadcasting permits an unprecedented socialisation that is deeply damaging to Bhutan’s stated agenda. Rather than engage with a complex censorship of particular programmes, I would suggest a simpler and more effective solution and allow broadcasting of imported programming only between the hours of 6 and 10pm. In this way it can be included in Bhutanese life without wholly undermining

cultural values to the extent that it is almost certainly doing at the moment.

This I believe is a critical challenge and one in which the opposing ideals of Buddhist and modern culture are inherent. Given the state of the current global order it is beyond doubt that Western style development is completely unsustainable and wholly indefensible in its polarisations of rich and the poor. The resource base of the planet is sufficiently limited that encouraging more rapid consumption of what remains is reckless in the extreme. Television is the mode through which enhanced appetites are propagated and although it might indeed be argued that individuals ought to be free to be shaped into these maladaptive priorities, such a perspective is defensible only to the extent that a Buddhist morality is suspended. The argument is similar in form to the government's recent laudable decision to ban smoking in the Kingdom. This decision recognises the negative effects of smoking on well being and denies individuals the right to do themselves and others harm through indulging the habit. A similar restraint can be applied to the television habit where again I believe there is a clear need for protective measures to be taken if Buddhism is to remain vital and vibrant.

Noting the need to contain the dissolving morality of modern individualism is only half of the strategic picture though, and simultaneously Bhutan would be well-advised to implement strategies through which Buddhism's authority can be maintained. Central to this is the generation of a thorough understanding of just how consumerism is impacting the world and why it cannot produce widespread happiness in either the short or the long term. Such wisdom must involve a clear comprehension that the root problem of modern globalisation lies in the disconnection it cultivates in the mind of the modern consumer – one that that renders all consumable goods and services devoid of history and future. It is indeed one of the hallmarks of modern consumer culture that products are removed from their social and ecological context and such a 'forgetting' is central to the expansion of

globalisation in its current form. If Bhutan as a nation is not to become party to the destructiveness of the modern world then it must freely and consciously decide that widespread privation and ecocide are not acceptable outcomes - a decision that can only emerge from a morally connected understanding of globalisation and its discontents. Thus a widespread understanding of the dynamics of global trade, finance, environment, society, culture, debt, governance and happiness must be encouraged if Bhutan's newly democratising government is to find the public support necessary for national restraint. This facilitation of national understanding can be engaged in a variety of ways only a few of which are sketched below.

Public Education through the Media

Although the negative effects of imported commercial television have been noted, it should be equally apparent that the medium has much to offer if it is utilised as an instrument for broad-mindedness as opposed to narrow-mindedness. This was the original intention in setting up the Bhutan Broadcasting Service (BBS) which was designed to provide a counterweight to the influence of imported programming. In its current form it does much that is useful for the continuation of Bhutanese culture through its popular radio and television offerings but its potential is perhaps being under-utilised to the extent that it does not contribute to a questioning of the hegemonic nature of incoming commercialisation. I suggest that BBS take on a wider role as an agency concerned not only with the promotion of existing culture but also with a critical questioning of the consumerist culture that seeks to replace it. There are a host of valuable documentaries that would be readily available to Bhutan if she were to show an interest. The global media network TVE for example is a non-profit distributor of high quality educational documentaries that has agreements with scores of countries allowing them to access and broadcast a huge range of programming exploring the current state of global society and environment. If these programmes were selectively broadcast in conjunction with the current range of

excellent indigenous programming, then Bhutan could go a long way towards cultivating the perspective necessary for walking a middle path of reasonable and sustainable development. This would be particularly so if such programming were skilfully integrated with current affairs programming encouraging public debate on the conflicting values and impacts of indigenous versus foreign style development.

The Public Education System

The value of education was noted early in Bhutan's five year planning process and the majority of the Kingdoms population now have widespread access to education. This is a very valuable advance but as many in Bhutan have pointed out, there is a considerable emphasis on an Anglo-Indian curriculum, one that enshrines the values of competitiveness, individual achievement and the technical mastery of numeracy and literacy. Alongside this largely imported system, is an indigenous monastic form in which more traditional emphases on self-understanding and moral clarity are uppermost. It is not surprising that these educational systems seem to produce different outcomes and that the former has been associated with a lesser respect for Buddhist knowledge and tradition. I would suggest that if a truly Buddhist path to happiness is desired, then it is important to explore the reasons why imported education seems to hinder an appreciation of existing culture.

Much of this may have to do with a radical under-emphasis on Buddhism as a way of understanding and orienting to the world around. Problem solving in the realms of language, mathematics and science are all of critical importance but this is equally true with regard to the interactions between environment, economy, governance, culture and self and these themes could usefully be integrated into the mainstream curriculum to much greater effect. The moral quality of these interactions is absolutely central to Gross National Happiness and I would suggest that these issues be brought into the heart of the national curriculum in order

that students gain the skills to debate and evaluate GNH as a national goal and the various means by which their own conduct might contribute to (or detract from) that goal. If these themes could be integrated at all levels of the education system then the understanding of happiness, morality and the four interdependent domains of culture, governance, environment and economy could be greatly advanced and the quality of national debate significantly improved. (In part this suggestion is based upon the striking observation that most 'ordinary' people I speak to in Bhutan have little to no idea of what GNH means).

Open Policy Formation.

In the day-to-day functioning of government, it is critically important that policy formation continue to be seen as an opportunity for education and debate over the direction of national development. An excellent precedent for this has already been set in the system of national five year plans which are widely available for public perusal and comment. It is particularly apparent in the current process of democratisation where the National Constitution has been made available to almost the entire population for their consideration and input. As has been constantly reiterated in this paper, a national consensus for a restrained and decent form of achieving national happiness can only be practically successful if the majority accept and internalise its foundational legitimacy and this can only be ensured if there is a broad understanding of GNH and its moral foundations on the part of the vast majority.

Given that Bhutan is in the process of decentralising its traditional monarchic power base, it is particularly important that the broad populace who will determine national policy through the democratic process be familiar with the moral grounding of national policy and the reasons for its development. Policy making should be driven by a spirit of genuine openness and resist any temptation towards dogmatism or force. After all, if the cultural framework from which GNH emanates is indeed sufficiently profound to direct

a more meaningful form of national development then it must be capable of standing up to scrutiny and open debate. If in fact it is valid, it can only be strengthened by such open exploration and so facilitating this within the broad polity would be time very well spent for Bhutan's future.

Summary and Conclusion

This paper has argued that Gross National Happiness is not the novel vision that many imagine but rather the central common goal of societies and cultures around the world. Further, it has been argued that all such sociologies have at their heart a moral code that insists upon the cultivation of sympathy and self-restraint if the goal of widespread happiness is to be achieved. The exception to this is globalisation in its modern form, an ideology that has removed itself from these explicit foundations to counter-intuitively propose that pursuing the means of individual accumulation can somehow substitute for an explicit pursuit of collective happiness and that in this pursuit no moral intentionality is required. This contrary perspective is both logically false and practically disastrous.

If Bhutan is to achieve the national happiness it seeks then it must reject this dissolving rationalisation as it constitutes little more than an opaque excuse for responsibility-free governance and morally oblivious self-indulgence. But as things stand the development philosophy of the Royal Government is only partially complete in pointing to four domains important to achieving national happiness. The true foundations of GNH are mutual sympathy and self-restraint as these determine the quality of relationship in each of the four domains listed above.

It is essential then that Bhutan recognise the fundamental nature of the development challenge that now faces the country and see the centrality of the conflict between opposing moral world views, one of which insists that the traditional strengths of generosity, compassion, loving-kindness and equanimity be enhanced, the other that they be

abandoned. If they are abandoned then Bhutan joins the host of nations that are forcing upon the world an unhappy and troublesome future. If they are maintained then Bhutan can rightfully accept the praise showered upon GNH by so many around the world. Buddhist restraint is deeply inimical to modernist economy which seeks to overthrow it and replace it with a wholly negligent freedom. Bhutan may prone to accepting this corruption not through any rational analysis of its worthiness but rather through the suspension of any critical judgement grounded in her own cultural inheritance. This can only be avoided if Bhutanese policy makers consciously place culture and its continuation at the heart of development and utilise its on-going wisdom in orienting responsibly and happily to the changing currents of modern times.
