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Vincenzo Giorgino

The Pursuit of Happiness and the Traditions of Wisdom

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The Pursuit of Happiness and the Traditions of Wisdom

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Preface

Human happiness as a research topic in social sciences has a long history and has been in constant growth in the last four decades. Why another volume on happiness then? I am strongly convinced that the answer this time is in the things, it is in the various contributions offered in this volume where a number of scholars in sociology and economics met together in a Conference in a Department of Torino University, originated and inspired by the *International Day of Happiness* on 20 March 2012, promoted by the United Nations. The initiative was first to take this date as a point of reference to develop an interdisciplinary discussion, considering various scientific points of view, within the large domain of social sciences and paying attention to other scientific fields such as neuro-sciences.

And we have in fact a recall to happiness as an everlasting question, where ancient wisdom could give some help in current times, even though differences are to be taken into consideration when considering empirical data and results from social research, as presented in the field survey on happiness, satisfaction and well-being.

Another inspiring and suggestive outlook stems from the consideration of happiness as a constructed reality, where current scientific paradigms are put in question by a kind of renewed capacity of ancient traditions to propose social practices useful to develop new tools of inquiry more adequate to human feelings and *humana conditio*.

The volume aims at signing a conspicuous point of reference for a new awareness of what and how social and economic research could contribute to ameliorate the human condition, trying to supersede the separation too often present between the researcher (the *scientist*!) and its object, the *humans*, considered in their singular, different and self-constructing arts of living.

October 2013 Marina Nuciari

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My sincere gratitude to Prof. Pietro Terna who greatly contributed towards making possible the Conference from which this book has its origin. I wish also to remind the encouragement and support received from Prof. Marina Nuciari.

Vincenzo Giorgino

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Introduction

The astonishing increase in research on happiness and well-being since the 1970s (Veenhoven, in this book) is a sign of scholars' growing sensibility toward a goal that is incessantly positioned at the centre of any sentient human being's life.

There is a general agreement that in handling issues such as happiness and well-being, sooner or later, one encounters the traditions of wisdom and their various interpretations of the matter. Whatever the scholars' point of view, this seems to be an appointment that cannot be missed. The contemporary formulations of these traditions and the discussion about their effectiveness is the captivating issue of this book.[1] Being more specific, its aim is to answer one main question: are they helpful in understanding well-being and its pursuit at an individual and societal level?

Luckily, as we live in a doubt-driven, scientifically laden world, this question implies a number of sub-questions, to make those traditions, their language and methods, understandable for us and available to scientific inquiry. This is also why all the contributors, more or less, deal with some methodological issues.

However, due to the same limits of the current dominant paradigm in science, the debate shows the emergence of these traditions in an almost unexpected light, achieving what 30 years ago was unthinkable or non-predictable: the legitimation and diffusion of secular practices originally born in a religious background. In other words, they are designed for the lay sentient being, whatever the medium they wear in the interactional situation—marketed services (the Yoga centre around the corner), state service provisions (a health promotion mindfulness-based programme in the secondary school) and voluntary organized services (a non-profit association offering an intensive meditation retreat for inmates).[2]

[1] This book is a re-elaboration of the presentations to the First VIS Conference "Economic and Social Suffering: From Awareness to Human Flourishing" for the *International Day of Happiness* held in Torino on 20 March 2013 at the *Department of Economic and Social Sciences, Mathematics and Statistics*, University of Torino.

[2] It is worthy of note that in the past, some traditions regulated the economic relationship between practitioner and contemplative teacher through the *dana* (gift)—a term (Pali and Sanskrit) indicating generosity as intention and act; in Mahayana Buddhism it is one of the six paramitas, the precious qualities cultivated in the pathway to *enlightenment*.

This book is clearly oriented to embrace these challenges and the answers provided to these questions are offered by scholars with different points of view about the possibility of the effectiveness of these traditions.

As I have no presumption to resume the arguments presented by the authors, I provide just a minimum of light, like the usher in the cinema, with the useful but non-exhaustive task to accompany readers to their seats.

The examination of the correlational findings based on a broad collection of studies of the *World Database of Happiness* (Veenhoven 2011) leads Ruut Veenhoven to a synthesis that is intriguing for the resulting ideal types relating the presence of classic beliefs in current social behaviour.

Next, Anna Maffioletti, Agata Maida and Francesco Scacciati argue about the definition of happiness in economic studies and their congruence on the basis of a field survey on happiness, life satisfaction and well-being conducted in the Italian Region of Piedmont: terminological problems arising within languages and between languages lead to methodological problems to which possible solutions are clearly suggested by them.

Serge Kolm reveals what is essential in contemplative wisdom from its origins: a systematic observation of daily inner experience, and the construction of effective remedies to the upsurge of suffering, "by making your mind and body more malleable". However, he interestingly sustains that the Buddhist conception of self can be intended as an extension of the utilitarian model.

Roberto Burlando concentrates his reflections on the relationships between ethics and economics. His broad sphere of interest is guided by a "back to basics" effort in which the Eastern traditions based on Dharma and the Aristotelian *eudaimonia* contribute to witness the possibility of a good life; it results in a dense contribution in which these 'traditions' nurture a radical critique to mainstream economics and suggest significant proposals for pragmatic innovative economic policies.

This is close to the thread of argument in Ryan et al. (2008), inviting to concentrate on the study of *eudaimonia* as distinct from—but not fully opposite to—*hedonia,* as they clarify, and focusing on the process of managing one's own life instead of measuring outcomes related to the achievement of pleasures. In this sense, happiness "is not conceived of as a mental state, a positive feeling, or a cognitive appraisal of satisfaction, but rather as a way of living" (ib.: 143).

In the last chapter, I address my attention to the contemporary forms assumed by contemplative practice in a secularized world, pinpointing the core theoretical and methodological issues that they uncover about the economic actor in a sociological perspective.

As we have enough empirical evidence about the overestimation by people of extra-happiness that they will get from extra possessions, this sounds, alongside Layard (2006), like a warning related to the current model of 'evolution' ('a negative internality': 6) and the British LSE economist suggests a wiser public policy in order to orient tastes, that are not given, as usually intended by orthodox economists.

Kolm, Burlando and Giorgino call for a systemic cultural change towards a wiser model of man. Whatever level the desired change could be in order to achieve a good life, they sustain the need for personal transformation as the brass

tacks: well-being is a life skill that can be learnt through specific social practices. This is a clear invitation to take into account a much more subtle and effective definition of self and action in social sciences.

Nevertheless, the present efforts are only the first step of a discussion that will hopefully be developed further. As all authors expect that the results of happiness studies can influence policies and even individual behaviours, I close with something that is more a partisan opening than a conclusion.

Veenhoven (2011), addressing the most important research findings of the last years, lists some unexpected results that contradict different mainstream sociological thinking and, in my view, have an important impact for a contemplative approach to well-being. They show that: social comparison does not tell the whole story as affection plays a key role; happiness is quite variable over lifetime; the majority of mankind enjoys life, a finding at odds with dominant 'sociology of misery' explanations Veenhoven (2006); average happiness is high and tends to rise in modern societies; in the Western world differences across social categories are smaller than expected; main difference being in personal skills to deal with life events; at macro level differences in happiness within nations tend to get smaller, contradicting the idea of a growing inequality in Western societies; people live more happily in what are considered 'individualistic' societies than in what are called collectivistic ones like Japan; people do not live more happily in welfare states that in equally rich nations in which public interventions are reduced (ib.: 11–12). It is worth noting that part of the awareness about these enhancements in social science is due to the opportunity of the *World Database of Happiness*. I think that a systematic dialogue with contemplative approaches to well-being through a reliable database will help both perspectives. But I need to take a step back before proceeding in this direction.

Contemplative studies suggest a different view from the shared consensus about the self-based Western culture—in people, as well as in social sciences—an issue that has been already a matter of analysis by Clifford Geertz (1974; for a more recent discussion see Spiro 1993).

The most successful integration of contemplative knowledge within the Western approach to well-being is called mindfulness (*Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction Training* in its full definition). Mindfulness is intended as presence[3,4]; Jon Kabat-Zinn, a pioneer in this field, defines mindfulness as "the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgementally o the unfolding of experience moment by moment" (Kabat-Zinn 2003). As this kind of resilient affective style[5] seems to be highly correlated to electrical activity in pre-frontal cortex (Davidson 2004), the discovery of the plasticity of our brain

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[3] For a description of its origin in one of the most known tradition, the Japanese Zen, see Pheian (2010).

[4] Dorjee (2010) insists on the two main components of mindfulness, attention and acceptance, and underlines the function of context.

[5] Resilience is "the capacity for rapid recovery following negative events as the maintenance of high levels of positive affect and well-being in the face of significant adversity" (Davidson 2004: 1397).

indicates a new interplay between first-person data and third-person inquiry via neural correlates; social scientists need a broader training and reliable sources of data to be very fit for developing a social science of well-being able to interact with social neurosciences.

In contemplative science the field of mindfulness is growing and the debate about the definition and operationalization of 'traditional' concepts is rich and ongoing—the mass of research is now over 1,000 titles long. Chiesa (2012) in his conclusions of an excellent review of the state of the art addresses the importance of self-reports and of neurological findings annotating that 'it is important to underscore that neuro-scientific and neuro-psychological findings, which in their generalizations and their artificial nature are currently grossly overestimated against clinical findings or self-reports, should not be considered an alternative to self reports of mindfulness but rather a complementary way to investigate the correlates of practising mindfulness'.[6]

As all convene, from both fields, on making their arguments empirically observable and implementable, it is possible to expect a broader archival strategy, including what is part of the rising area of contemplative science of well-being, which transcends various disciplines, psychology, medicine, education, management and organizational studies, social neurosciences and neuro-phenomenological studies as well.

So far, 'business as usual' cannot anymore be the mantra of our activity. The divide between subject and object, actor and agency, choices and conditions as well as between quantitative science and text-based science must be superseded. As the French economist and sociologist Michel Callon with the methodologist John Law argue (2005) in a paper about agency and self, the divide between calculation and judgement must be overcome (what they call 'qualculation') in order to understand economic processes. This means to take seriously the abandonment of any empiricist approach in favour of an enactive social science. Social investigation does not only study the world: it contributes to make it and 'it can, in some measure, think about the worlds it wants to help to make' (Law and Urry 2005). On the empirical evidence of a surprising growth of ethnographic studies, Mike Savage shows how quantitative forms of analysis 'can be recast in a non-positivist frame' (2013).

There is enough evidence of the entrepreneurial skills shown by the traditions of wisdom, capable of integration in the current scientific practice and theory. This leads us to support the belief that these capacities will influence social sciences for the good, i.e. with the aim of the reduction of human suffering, and kindly convince the 'intransigent modernists'[7] (Basole 2005). Economics, as Basole shows,

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[6] Another quite recent, very useful, meta-analysis is due to Grossman et al. (2004); see also the evaluation study made by Ospina et al. (2007).

[7] This author offers an interesting argumentation about Gandhi and Kumarappa economic theories and the whole problem of *tradition*, *modernity* and *post-modernity* in economics—at this point all terms should be bracketed, as phenomenologists could suggest—that their impermeability is no more operating in favour of knowledge as common good.

remains 'intransigently modernist', faithful to those principles and values linked to the Siècle Lumière or Age of Reason, such as 'belief in continued progress, both scientific and material, an attitude to domination towards nature, a positivist epistemology and recognition of the fact-value split' (Basole 2005: 2) and most of all, opposed to the Dark Age based on irrational beliefs.[8] However, even critical thinking in sociology and Marxism jumped on the bandwagon.

Contemplative enlightenment follows a different path: it does not oppose 'tradition' to 'modernity' and, in a sense, it could provisionally be called *non-modern* (Basole 2005). In its invitation to go back to basics, sustaining an 'economics of permanence'—a term originally introduced by Kumarappa, then retrieved by Schumacher 1973 (Basole 2005)—it accompanies us to non-taken for granted answers about the way we wish to shape our social and economic relationships, superseding those approaches grounded on divided thinking that, if followed, will lead us in the middle of nowhere.

Turin, 11 October 2013 Vincenzo Giorgino

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[8] In this book the reader will come across a curious coincidence: the co-existence of two very different usages of the term enlightenment. One refers to what is intended as the European inheritance after the Dark Age as the rhetorics of modernity tells us, the other is what 'traditions' offer to us as a training pathway to liberation.

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Chapter 1
Classic Wisdom About Ways to Happiness: How Does It Apply Today?

Ruut Veenhoven

1.1 Introduction

Interest in happiness is rising these days and this conference is a manifestation of this trend. In the scientific world, this interest has given rise to both new empirical research and renewed attention for classic thought.

Renewed Call for Greater Happiness
During the middle ages in Europe it was widely believed that happiness was not possible during one's earthly life and that morality was to be based on the word of God. These views were contested in the Enlightenment; happiness came to be seen as attainable and morality as man-made. A lively discussion on the relation between happiness and morality emerged (Mauzi 1960; Buijs 2007) and in this climate an instrumental view on morality appeared, in which maintaining ethical codes was seen as a means to secure a happy life.

Though welcomed in enlightened circles in the 18th century, this view was rejected by the dominant ideologies of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century. The strongest opposition came from the churches, which saw little value in early happiness and continued to profess a principalistic morality based on the ten commandments. The liberals of the time had reservations about the greatest happiness principle; in their power struggle with the aristocracy they emphasized freedom. Likewise the socialists who entered the scene in the late 19th century prioritized social equality. Nationalism dominated in first half of the 20th century during the period of the two world wars, and the nationalists were more interested in national glory than in individual happiness.

Much of this enlightened thought is reflected in Jeremy Bentham's (1789) 'Introduction to morals and legislation'. Bentham argues that the moral quality of action should be judged by its consequences on human happiness, and he also claims that we should aim at the 'greatest happiness for the greatest number'. Bentham defined happiness in terms of psychological experience, as 'the sum of pleasures and pains'. His philosophy is known as 'utilitarianism', because of its

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emphasis on the utility of behavioural consequences. 'Happyism' would have been a better name, since this utility is seen to contribute to happiness.

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As a result, interest in happiness declined and one of the indications of this decline is a sharp drop in the use of the word in book titles after 1800 (Buijs 2007). When I took a course in Social Philosophy in the 1960s, I encountered Bentham's greatest happiness principle as a historical topic. Yet a revival was in the air, people began to seek happiness, ever more books on 'How to be happy' appeared in bookshops, and happiness became a topic on the political agenda.

This renewed interest in greater happiness was driven by several factors. One of these is that many pressing ills had been overcome such as wars and epidemics. The second half of the twentieth century was characterized by peace, democracy and an unprecedented rise in our standards of living. This gave way to more positive goals, such as improving public health and happiness. Another factor was the development of a multiple-choice society in which individuals could choose how to live their life and therefore were interested in what way of life would be most satisfying. The rise of happiness on the political agenda was also facilitated by the weakening of the earlier ideological opposition mentioned above. Churches were in decline, the liberals and the socialists had attained most of their ideals and nationalism had lost much of its appeal.

Emergence of Empirical Research

The rising public interest in happiness was paralleled by the increasing attention paid to this topic among scientists. Happiness became a major topic of interest in several new strands of research: in 'social indicators research' which emerged in the 1970s, in medical 'quality of life research' which developed in the 1980s and the strands 'positive psychology' and 'happiness economics' which appeared around the year 2000. The number of scientific publications on happiness has grown steeply since the 1960s, as can be seen from Fig. 1.1. In all this research the leading question is: What makes people happy? and the major motivation has been to advance happiness.

Revert to Classic Wisdom

This renewed interest in happiness has also manifested in a fascination with classical thought on ways to happiness. Ancient wisdom from the east was found in Indian Vedas and Buddhist philosophy and Asian classic texts were translated

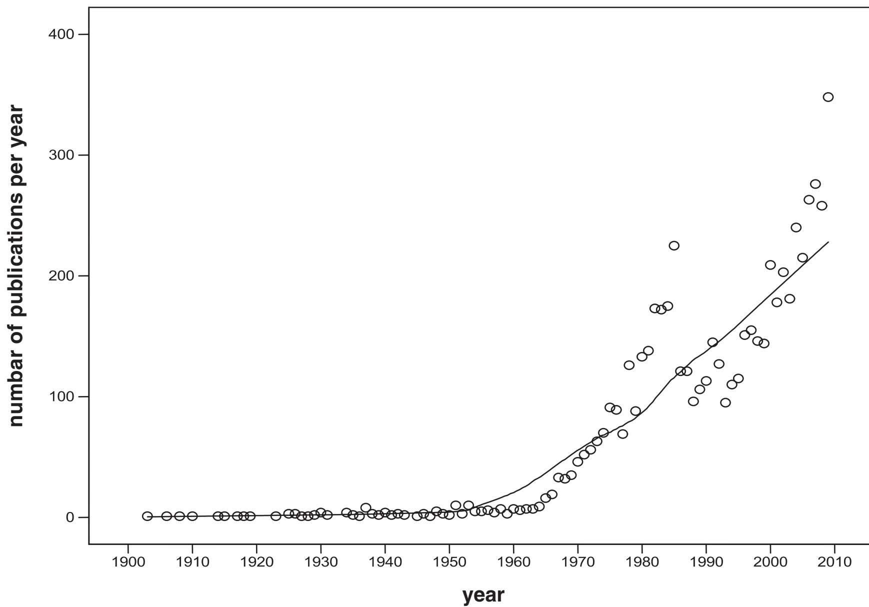

Fig. 1.1 Scientific publications on happiness since 1900. *Source* Bibliography of Happiness (Veenhoven 2013b)

into modern English. A recent book on the teachings on happiness by Tibet's Dalai Lama sold more than a million copies (Dalai Lama XIV and Cutler 1998). Likewise, the views of early western philosophers have been scrutinized for advice on happiness, such as in Wilhelm Schmid's 'philosophy of art of living'. A recent account of the history of philosophical thought on happiness has been published by MacMahon (2005).

Yet, with so much modern research literature available on happiness, why do we revert to classic teaching? One reason is that the scattered facts about happiness found in modern research are yet to be crystallized into clear rules for a happy life. Classical thought provides rules without facts. A related factor seems to be the belief that seasoned wisdom may have already captured the big principles behind observable facts. Another driver is modern romanticism and our related openness to 'alternative' views from other times and cultures, the lure of mysticism (Schmid 2005).

1.2 Classic Views on Ways to Happiness

The most 'classic' views on happiness that we know are views that have been written down. Writing appeared late in human history and for that reason we do not know anything about our preliterate ancestors' views on happiness over the

thousands of centuries that they lived as hunter gatherers. What reflections we have on ways to happiness date from advanced agricultural society in which scholarship developed in the context of religious institutions and noble courts (e.g. Nolan and Lensky 2011–2012).

The classical teachings on happiness are about how to live a good life. The term 'good' in how to live a good life is mostly seen in living a morally correct life and behaving in a proper manner, typically being religiously devoted and socially responsible. Yet subjective enjoyment of life is also acknowledged and often seen as a by-product of good behaviour.

There is much diversity in the classical advice on how to live a good life and this diversity roots in the variety of possible views on what a good life is and in the public served with the message. Below I present five major strands of advice, which rather than expanding in detail and justifying, I will place in the social context from which they emerged.

Way of the Warrior
A common strand of advice is to live a brave and adventurous life and reap fame and power. This advice fits the ideals of the warrior class in feudal societies and several scholars living in the noble courts have praised this way of life. The crusader is exemplary of this view, fighting daringly for the right cause and rewarded with fame, power and wealth in earthly life and with heaven in afterlife.

Way of the Merchant
A civilian variant is to seek success in trade and gain wealth. This advice fits the way of life of the merchant class that developed late in advanced agricultural societies and is typically professed by intellectual exponents of the attendant culture, such as protestant ministers and teachers. Icons of this view are explorers, inventors and founders of big business. The 'protestant ethic' is a frugal alternate of this view on the good life.

Both the above views see happiness in active involvement in society. Following Weber (1905) this can be characterized as an 'inner worldly' (innerweltlich) orientation. Parallel to these views there has always been admonition that reflects an outer worldly (auserweltlich) orientation. Below are three variants of happiness advice of this kind.

Way of the Philosopher
In this line of advice happiness can best be achieved in a contemplative life. Life becomes more bearable if we understand it better, both the world around us and our inner self. Hence happiness is sought in knowledge, typically distant knowledge free from disturbing emotion. Happiness is equated with wisdom.

This view fits the life of professional philosophers and the advice is actually to live as a philosopher. An icon of this view is the Greek philosopher Epicure, who retreated from the turbulent society of his time into the peaceful environment of his walled garden, where he immersed himself in gentle intellectual conversation with followers while enjoying good food (Bergsma et al. 2008).

Way of the Peasant
An intellectually less demanding alternative way to happiness is to live a simple life, preferably in the country. Renouncement of opulence will save us a lot of frustration and contact with nature will cure alienation.

This romantic advice is typically not delivered to poor peasants, but to well-to-do city dwellers, who assume that the grass is greener in the country. Although mostly a matter of alternative dreaming, this advice has instigated several 'back-to-the-land' movements such as the 'communes' and the Arts and Crafts movement in the nineteenth century.

Way of the Monk
The most radical alternative way to happiness is to seclude oneself from society and seek refuge in the isolation of a desert or behind the walls of a cloister. Again a key idea is that it is better not to want things one cannot get. The attendant ideas are that one can discipline oneself to live with the bare minimum and that there is deep gratification to be found in religious practices such as prayer. Endurance of discomfort in one's current life is seen as a ticket to better conditions in an afterlife.

As in the case of the philosophers, this advice was typically professed by its practitioners, that is, the clerical class which constituted a considerable part of the population in medieval society and was quite influential intellectually.

1.3 How to Assess Applicability Today? Observed Happiness on Advised Ways to Happiness

The renewed interest in this ancient wisdom about happiness begs the question of how applicable it is in the conditions of contemporary society. Does it apply at all or might it even take us from the frying pan into the fire? Are some of the recommended ways to happiness better fitted to the present than others? Below I will answer these questions using the available research findings on conditions for happiness in modern society.

Concept of Happiness
To answer these questions, we first need a clear concept of happiness. This concept should be distinct from the advised ways of life to avoid conflation. It should also be measurable so that differences in happiness on advised ways of life can be assessed empirically.

I have defined happiness elsewhere as the 'subjective enjoyment of one's life as a whole' (Veenhoven 1984, 2000). In this definition happiness is synonymous with life satisfaction and this meaning also fits Bentham's definition of happiness as 'the sum of pleasures and pains'. Happiness in this sense is conceptually different from objectivistic notions of a morally desirable life and is as such well suited for

this test. The concept is also well measurable. Happiness, defined as 'subjective enjoyment', denotes something that people have on their mind, which like all states of awareness can be measured using questioning.

Questions on happiness can be framed in several ways and sometimes address subtly different things than life satisfaction. All the acceptable questions ever used in the empirical research are listed in the collection 'Measures of Happiness' of the World Database of Happiness (Veenhoven 2013c). The research findings mentioned in the next section are based on questions admitted to that collection after a check for fit with the concept of happiness as defined above.

Empirical Approach

I followed the methodology used in a special issue of the Journal of Happiness Studies on 'Advise of the Wise' (Bergsma 2008), in which the reality value of various recommendations for a happier life are explored. One of the articles in that issue was about the advice implied in three ancient Chinese philosophies. Together with Zhang Guoquing I first listed the advocated ways of life and next checked whether modern people who live accordingly are happier than contemporaries who do not (Veenhoven and Guoquing 2008). For this purpose we drew on research findings gathered in the World Database of Happiness and, in particular, in the collection of 'Correlational Findings' (Veenhoven 2013d).

Data on Conditions for Happiness in Contemporary Society

In this study I also draw on the World Database of Happiness. To date this 'findings archive' contains some 20,000 research findings, each of which is described on separate 'pages' in a standard format using standard terminology (Veenhoven 2011). These finding pages can be sorted subjectwise and this enabled me to select findings that pertain to advised ways of life.

I will not present these findings individually, but will characterize the typical correlation as either positive (+), non-existent (0) or negative (−). I will also not dwell on the many variations to this general pattern. The reader can find all the details using the links to the finding reports given in the right-hand side columns of Tables 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4 and 1.5.

Limitations

The bulk of the findings gathered in the World Database of Happiness come from studies performed in western nations since the 1970s. So the check will limit the applicability to this kind of society.

Although the number of research findings is large, only a part bears information about the conditions addressed in classic advice on happiness. Most of these findings are based on samples of the general population and studies in subgroups are scarce to date. So I can consider applicability for the average citizen, but have, as yet, little perspective on the applicability of this advice in specific subgroups of the population, such as elderly widows or unemployed academics.

Table 1.1 Way of the soldier: correlation of leading advised way of life with happiness

Way of life	Correlation with happiness	*Source* section in collection correlational findings	
		Name	Code
Social prestige	+	Current socioeconomic status	S9.2
Leadership	+	Current leadership	L2.2
Autonomous	++	Current personality: inner control	P4.58
Ambitious	+	Current personality: ambitious	P4.2
Pleasure seeking	+	Current values: hedonic	V2.1.1
Adventure seeking	0/+	Current personality: Sensation seeking	P4.95
Warfare	−	Earlier involvement in war	W1.1.1

Table 1.2 Way of the merchant: correlation of leading advised way of life with happiness

Way of life	Correlation with happiness	*Source* section in collection correlational findings	
		Name	Code
Income	+	Current income	I1.2
Possessions	+	Current possessions	P10.2
Employment	+	Current employment	E2.2
Working hours	0	Current working hours	W4.2.15
Civil involvement	+	Current participation in associations	S7.2
	+	Current political participation	P8.2.2
Active	+	Current activity level	A1.2
Zestful	+	Current personality: zestful	P4.120
Protestant ethic	+	Current work values	V2.2.3
Materialism	−	Current terminal values: materialism	V2.1.1.3

Table 1.3 Way of the philosopher: correlation of leading advised way of life with happiness

Way of life	Correlation with happiness	*Source* section in collection correlational findings	
		Name	Code
Study	+	Current activities: study	A2.3.4
Intelligence	0	Test intelligence (IQ)	E3.2.1
Education	0/+	Educational level	E1.2
Value knowledge	0	Current values: education	V2.2.6
Student	0	Currently involved in schooling	S1.2.1.1

A great deal of the findings are based on bivariate analyses and these are vulnerable to spurious correlation. If such distortion is controlled in multivariate analyses, I give greater weight to these in my estimate of the typical correlation.

Correlation between advised behaviour and happiness is no proof of a causal effect. Statistical associations can also be driven by effects of happiness on the way of life chosen, for instance, because happiness fosters social involvement, while unhappiness rather discourages outgoing behaviour (e.g. Lyubomirsky, Diener and King 2005). On some of the topics, we have indications of the direction of causality and, if so, I will mention these in the text. If no such indications are available I assume that at least part of the correlation is due to an effect of lifestyle on happiness.

Table 1.4 Way of the peasant: correlation of leading advised way of life with happiness

Way of life	Correlation with happiness	*Source* section in collection correlational findings	
		Name	Code
Low income	–	Current income	I1.2
Modest housing	–	Current quality of house	H14.2.3.1
No car, PC, etc.	–	Current possessions	P10.2
Immaterialism	+	Current terminal values: materialism	V2.1.1.3
Asceticism	0	Living up to ascetic values	V5.2
Rural living	–/0	Current rural living (vs. urban)	L10.2.1.2

Table 1.5 Way of the monk: correlation of leading advised way of life with happiness

Way of life	Correlation with happiness	*Source* section in collection correlational findings	
		Name	Code
Social isolation	–	Current intimate contacts	I6.2
Non-participation	–	Current personal contacts	S6.2
		Current organizational participation	S7.2
Non-possession	–	Current possessions	P10.2
Focus on inner life	–	Current values: meditation on inner life	V2.1
	–	Current values: stoic self control	
Religiousness	0/+	Current religiousness	R1.2
	0/+	Current religious practices: prayer	R1.4.3
	+	Concern about religion	R1.6.1

1.4 Results of Applicability Checks

Below I list the available research findings on correlates of happiness in contemporary society that link up with classic advice for living a happy life; for each topic I mention the subject code in the collection of Correlational Findings and provide a link to the finding report in which full details can be found.

1.4.1 Way of the Warrior

This way to a happy life involves the pursuit of power and adventure. As such it will require leadership behaviour and should result in social prestige. This way of life calls for the cultivation of personal characteristics such as boldness and independence and openness to thrills and pleasure. Involvement in warfare is part of the way.

The available research findings on these topics are summarized in Table 1.1. The correlation with happiness is typically positive, which suggests that this way of life is satisfying for most people. In the case of involvement in war, there is a negative relationship, war veterans being less happy than comparable compatriots. So the way of the warrior should not lead one into an actual war.

1.4.2 Way of the Merchant

This advice for a happy life recommends active involvement in work and citizenship, which will show up in a high activity level. Involvement in work appears in employment and working hours, and is likely to materialize in income and wealth. A protestant work ethic fits this way of life as well as some forms of materialism. Involvement in civil society will appear in participation in voluntary associations and in politics. All this requires a zestful personality.

The observed correlations of these markers of the way of the merchant with happiness are given in Table 1.2. Most of the correlations are positive. Yet there is no clear correlation with working hours and the correlation with moral materialism is negative. This suggests that one can also go along on this path.

1.4.3 Way of the Philosopher

In this recommendation, greater happiness can be achieved by having a better understanding of the world and oneself. When practiced, this advice must lead to studying well and result in high intelligence and success in school. Moral valuation of knowledge is part of that way. If studying is a proper way to happiness, we can also expect that students are typically happier than their non-studying age mates.

The available findings on each of the indicators of this way of life are given in Table 1.3. The support is mixed in this case. Although people who have spent time many years in school tend to be somewhat happier than people who have spent less, the resulting wisdom appears to be uncorrelated with happiness. Surprisingly, smart people are not happier than dummies, as I have shown in more detail elsewhere (Veenhoven and Choi 2012). Likewise there is little correlation between educational level and happiness, in particular not when income is controlled for. A moral valuation of education is also not contingent with greater happiness.

How about the happiness of students who are at least temporarily on the way of the philosopher? The findings are again mixed, some studies show slightly greater happiness among students, but more studies show no difference with working youth. Given that advantaged people are overrepresented among students and that students enjoy more freedom this does not suggest that this way of life yields greater happiness, at least not for the average person.

1.4.4 Way of the Peasant

Let us now consider the rewards of a simple life. This way of life is not paved with any luxury, one has to make do with a small income, modest housing and without expensive commodities such as cars and computers. To live happily in such

Table 1.6 Summary: applicability of classic advice for a happy life today

Advised ways to happiness in the past		Chance of happiness today
Way of the warrior	Seek fame, power and thrill	+
Way of the merchant	Seek success in business and work	+
Way of the philosopher	Seek understanding, keep distance	0
Way of the peasant	Lead a simple life	−
Way of the monk	Seclude from society, focus on inner life	−

conditions, one must value simplicity and live up to these values. This way of life is typically practiced in the country rather than in cities.

Findings on the relation between these hallmarks of simplicity and happiness are given in Table 1.4. Most of the correlations are negative, particularly when it comes to the actual standard of living. Moral appreciation of simplicity appears to go with greater happiness, but moral ascetics who live up to these values are no happier than the ones who do not.

The question of whether we live happier in the country than in the city is more complicated than would seem at first sight, since the picture is distorted by selective settlement, such as rich commuters who live in the country but work in a city. The available data does not support the view of rural happiness.

1.4.5 Way of the Monk

Lastly, the advice to seek happiness in holy isolation. This kind of life involves considerable social isolation, typically one follows that way without kin. Likewise there is little involvement in society and partly for that reason living conditions are typically poor. On this harsh way, travellers focus on inner experience and seek happiness in religious activities.

I present some research findings on the relation between these features and happiness in Table 1.5. The correlations are typically negative. Apparently we are not built to live in isolation. A focus on inner life does not go with greater happiness either. Several studies have documented a positive correlation between religious involvement and happiness, but not all.

1.4.6 In Sum

The findings discussed above are summarized in Table 1.6. Together, this review of research findings suggests that classic recommendations to seek happiness in this world still apply today, while the advice to seek happiness in distancing oneself from society works out negatively in contemporary conditions. These results fit my earlier analysis of the present-day relevance of the advice embodied in three

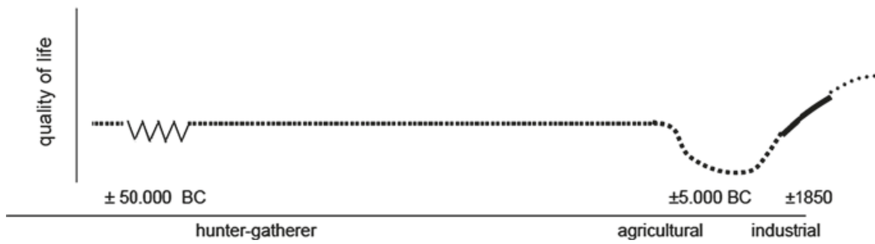

Fig. 1.2 Quality of life over human history. *Source* Veenhoven 2010)

classical Chinese philosophies, in which Confucianism performed best because of its inner-worldly orientation.

1.5 More Appropriate in the Past?

The belief that detachment from society is a proper way to avoid unhappiness may have been more appropriate in the time where this view was first recorded, that is, in an early agrarian society.

There is good evidence that the quality of life was low in the agrarian phase of societal development, and considerably lower than in the earlier phase of hunter-gatherer existence. Inspection of human remains has shown that people lived equally short lives in agrarian society, but suffered more malnutrition and diseases. A greater proportion of the population died of violence than ever before in human history. Moreover, the conditions of agrarian existence seem to have led our ancestors into an oppressive social system, which Maryanski and Turner (1992) characterize a 'social cage'. This view of quality of life over human history is summarized in Fig. 1.2.

If true, the advice to seek happiness in outer-worldy detachment will have been apt, in particular for the powerless of these days. The ways of the peasant and the monk were ways to avoid too much unhappiness rather than a ticket to a satisfying life.

1.6 Conclusion

Some of the classic beliefs about happiness still apply today, in particular the idea that social engagement tends to result in a satisfying life. Some classic recommendations should not be followed in contemporary society; especially not the advice to forsake its comforts and retreat into an inner world.

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Chapter 2
More Terminological and Methodological Problems in Measuring Happiness, Life Satisfaction and Well-Being: Some First Empirical Results

Anna Maffioletti, Agata Maida and Francesco Scacciati

2.1 Introduction

In spite of the abundance of literature on happiness economics (and surroundings, such as life satisfaction and well-being),[1] we believe that quite a number of terminological and methodological problems have not been solved yet: we will cope with some of them in this study.

2.2 Terminological Problems

In the literature, some terminological problems are present within languages and some others between languages.

(a) As for those within languages one of the main questions is: are the notions of 'happiness', 'life-satisfaction' and 'well-being' substantially equivalent (as is taken for granted in most literature) or not? And, if not, are there some factors that systematically determine subjects' different self-valuations when asked about their feeling happy or satisfied or well off? Moreover, are we sure that all researchers mean the same thing when using the same word? And that all respondents understand the same thing when facing the same word? And, if so, is it the same thing that researchers mean?

(b) As for the problems between languages they regard translation. Most of the literature on happiness economics is, obviously, written in English, but most of the countries in which the questionnaires are distributed are not

[1] A very good survey and comments on literature coping with happiness, life satisfaction and well-being economics is in OECD Guidelines on Measuring Subjective Well-being (April 2013). Most of the methodological and terminological problems that are coped with in our chapter are discussed in this OECD issue: the comments show that for most of them no really conclusive argument has yet been reached. See also: Veenhoven (2010).

V. Giorgino, *The Pursuit of Happiness and the Traditions of Wisdom*,
SpringerBriefs in Well-Being and Quality of Life Research,
DOI: 10.1007/978-3-319-04744-7_2, © The Author(s) 2014

English-speaking countries. Therefore, there is a serious risk that something may be *lost in translation*. As for Italian, the keyword is itself problematic. All dictionaries will present, as first translation of the word *happiness*, the word 'felicità'. But probably what is meant by *happiness* in English is not what most Italians mean by the word *felicità* (and the same may happen for Spanish, French, etc.). If asked, in an open question, to speak about the concept of 'felicità', quite a number of Italians would answer citing the old proverb 'la felicità non è di questo mondo', whereas probably very few English speaking subjects would answer 'happiness does not belong to this world'. The fact is that the word *felicità* represents something extremely intense and absolute, that those that believe in god and in the immortality of the soul would say can be everlastingly enjoyed only in heaven and, in any case, most people would say that it can be enjoyed in life only in a few moments or, at most, for very short periods. On the contrary, happiness can be enjoyed even for 'small' events and for very long periods, also life-long, if you are lucky enough. Probably the word *happiness* may be better translated into Italian with the word 'contentezza' (and, therefore, *happy* with 'contento'). There are no problems in translating *life satisfaction* in 'soddisfazione per la propria vita', whereas there is no way to translate the word *well-being*, unless you ascribe to it only its material and economical sense. In this case the translation would be 'benessere', but this is not what is meant in this field of research. Probably 'qualità della vita' (quality of life) is the best translation for *well-being*.

2.3 Methodological Problems

Some methodological problems are just as important and difficult to be solved as those discussed above. One of the main methodological problems deals with the possibility of assigning cardinal values to answers when questions are expressed in a numerical scale. In particular, often, psychologists accept the cardinal principle, whereas economists seem to prefer the more limiting but also more reliable ordinal comparability of answers. The question seems not to be amenable to a definitive solution. But even if the acceptability of the cardinal hypothesis could be proved and therefore would prevail, still quite a number of methodological problems would remain.

(a) A first, a very important question that needs an answer is the following. 'Do respondents, *facing a numerical scale*, first mentally answer the question *how happy are you?* (or something similar) in a verbal scale and then "translate" their answer into numbers?' That is, do they first place their own valuation somewhere on a verbal scale, for instance going from 'very unhappy' to 'very happy', that has just as many steps as the numerical one and then give their numerical answer at the corresponding level or do they skip this step and respond directly in numerical terms? We thought this problem may be coped

with by asking the same subject the same question twice (at a good distance one from the other), the first time asking her/him to answer on a verbal scale and the second time on a numerical scale (half of the times the other way round).

If the answers are not significantly different, then the question at stake sill stands unsolved (although the hypothesis of the 'translation' of concepts into numbers is strengthened), but if they are significantly different, this means that there is no 'translation', and therefore a second question pops up: which of the two answers is more reliable? We believe that most human beings would be more at ease, when asked 'how happy are you?', if they could choose their answer, say on a 7-step scale, between 'very unhappy', 'unhappy', 'rather unhappy', 'neither unhappy nor happy', 'rather unhappy', 'happy' and 'very happy', rather than between 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7, even if explained that 1 corresponds to the lowest level possible and 7 to the highest. Moving from this first methodological problem, we picked out two more of them.

(b) Now comes the second question. 'Is the wording adopted in a verbal scale relevant?' More precisely, sticking to the 'happiness example', do respondents answer in the same way if they are asked to value their degree of happiness on a '*bipolar* scale' going from 'very unhappy' to 'very happy' and on a '*unipolar* scale' going from 'not at all happy' to 'very happy'?

We believe that, if verbal scales are chosen, bipolar scales should be preferred. Let us take, for example, the international ranking presented in a survey by Adrian White in 2007. Denmark—the happiest country in the world, relying on his calculations—scores 2.73 whilst Burundi, in the last position, scores 100. ('Scores have been presented from an index baseline of 100 for ease of comparison.'). Denmark therefore scores 273 times as much as Burundi: more or less on a 1–10 scale, 8.5 versus more or less 3. But three what? Three positive points: this means that unhappiness has been arbitrarily cancelled from the face of the Earth.

(c) If you consider the above mentioned as a conclusive argument, does it lead necessarily to the convenience of adopting the bipolar structure also in numerical scales? That means, should we use scales going from negative to positive values (i. e. in an 11 point scale, from -5 to $+5$)? Logically, the answer to this question should be 'yes', especially because of the ambiguity, in a unipolar numerical scale, of the first half of it, up to the middle point.

This aspect is present and discussed in detail in the above-mentioned OECD issue, as for verbal scales: '*In a unipolar format, the scale midpoint is intended to represent a moderate amount of the variable of interest, whereas in a bipolar form at the mid point is intended to represent a more neutral territory in between the two opposing constructs: this should, in theory, have significant consequences for the meaning of the scale points. For example, a score of 0 on the unipolar scale above implies the absence of happiness, whereas a score of 5 implies a moderate amount of happiness. Conversely, on the bipolar scale, a score of 0 should denote complete unhappiness, a score of 5 implies the respondent is neither happy nor unhappy, and a score around 7 or 8 would imply a moderate amount of happiness.*'

But the same problems stand for the whole of the first half of the positive numerical steps. Answering the question "how happy are you?" on a scale going, say, from 0 to 10 what does a '3' mean? Some subjects answering 3 will want to express being moderately happy (because 3 is anyhow a positive value), others being rather unhappy (because 3 is less than the middle point, that they consider representative of a 'neither—nor' valuation).

A counterargument in disfavour of bipolar numerical scales is that the positive side and the negative side may not be comparable with each other (they still allow for sums and averages, but not for ratios). Another one is that quite a number of respondents may not be at ease with negative numbers and therefore tend to ignore them. The OECD issue quotes quite a number of publications where it is shown that the average value of self-reported happiness (or life satisfaction or well-being) is significantly higher when measured by bipolar numerical scales because the negative numbers are less often selected than low positive ones in a unipolar numerical scale.

(d) Another important question deals with scales. 'Are numerical scales reliable?' We consider a numerical scale reliable if the answer given on it fairly corresponds to the answer given on a verbal scale with the same number of steps. For example, let us imagine that subject A is the representative individual and she is asked 'how happy are you?' We don't know exactly what goes on in her brain in the following instants, but we know that she will answer using words like 'rather unhappy' or 'very happy' and so on (or something very similar). Let us say that, facing an 11-point verbal scale—'neither happy nor unhappy' is at the sixth step—she answered, with not much difficulty (we may presume) 'rather happy' which is at the eighth step. Now let us imagine that, after a while, she is asked again the same question, but now she must select a number corresponding to her valuation on a scale going from 0 to 11. She *should* select '8'. If most of the subjects do so, and therefore spot out on the numerical scale the number that is in the same position as the expression selected on the verbal scale, we can state that numerical scales are reliable. Of course a '7' or a '9' would leave some uncertainty about the numerical scale reliability, but certainly something less than '7' or more than '9' would not. Even a 'corresponding average' would not warrant for reliability: we would also, obviously, need a very low variance. And, here comes a connected question, if numerical scales turn out to be reliable, are bipolar scales more reliable than unipolar scales or vice versa? That is, which type of numerical scale 'fits' better with the answers given on the verbal scales?

(e) The fifth, and last (as for this study) question. 'Can self-valuation be the only criterion on which public decision making for improving public happiness, life satisfaction and well-being should rely, or should public policies rely on (or also on) objective factors?' In favour of the first option stands the simple argument that nobody can know better than oneself whether she/he is happy or not and what would help feeling better. But there are some reasons in support of the opposite option.

A factor that (at least to our opinion) should be adopted as an objective criterion, besides (not *instead*, of course) self-valuation is life expectation. The unemployed and the ill can make their voice audible in self-reported valuation surveys, but the dead, of course, cannot. They simply vanish from the sample. You can ask somebody how happy she/he would be if she/he knew that the next day he is going to be fired or she is going to break her leg. And if that really happens (and it does happen to plenty of people) you may still ask them how happy they feel after the mishap has actually occurred. You can also ask somebody how happy she/he would feel if she/he knew that she/he was going to die the next day (probably the valuation would be 0 in a 0–10 scale and minus whatever in a negative–positive scale). But if she/he actually does die (and it does happen to over 150,000 people every day in the world), then the negative valuation simply disappears from the survey—differently from the other cases. All mishaps affect negatively the overall average of self-reported happiness, except for the worst one of all. Therefore we believe that changes over time in subjective valuations are objectively underestimated in presence of significant increases in life expectation. For this and for quite a number of other reasons, the use of both subjective and objective criteria seems to us the most fruitful method of analysis. Nevertheless, a big question mark about the correct mix would still stand, difficult to be answered.

2.4 A Research on Happiness, Life Satisfaction and Well-Being in Piedmont

By means of a face-to-face 1,241 interview survey—beyond assessing the levels of happiness, life satisfaction and well-being perceived by the population of Piedmont and identifying the factors that determine them—we took the opportunity offered by a grant from the Regional Government of Piedmont to the Department of Economics of the University of Torino, to try to solve some of the problems discussed above.

Following the result of a pre-test, we decided to choose a bipolar verbal 7-step scale and both bipolar and unipolar 7-step numerical scales, because:

(a) most of the literature adopts 11-point scales and we wanted to see if something different would show up with a different scale;
(b) we noted that, beyond the 7 steps, the differences in a verbal scale between each step and the following were rather difficult to be appreciated: therefore, if we accept the ‘mental translation hypothesis’ (i.e. from concepts, verbally thought of, into numbers), also the difference between, say, a 2 and a 3 or between a 7 and an 8, should be equally difficult to be appreciated on an 11-step numerical scale;
(c) we believed that, if valuations are ‘translated’ from words into numbers, it may be more difficult to spot out a ‘4’ in a unipolar scale corresponding to a

'neither unhappy nor happy' valuation rather than a 'zero' on a bipolar scale, in spite of the fact that, in the literature, practically only positive numerical scales are adopted.[2] Therefore we adopted bipolar numerical scales;

(d) we also adopted unipolar numerical scales to compare their results with the bipolar ones.

2.5 Some First Results

We did not even try to give an answer to all the problems we mentioned above, but we did try to answer some of them.

We coped with the terminological question if the terms 'happiness', 'life satisfaction' and 'well-being' are understood as synonymous—and with the linked question if they are determined by the same factors—and with the numerical scale question.[3]

(a) To be able to face the first question, we simply asked each of the 1,241 interviewed subjects how they valued, for themselves, the level of each of these notions. There were two questionnaires, A and B (50 % of the sample each), identical except for the position of the questions on happiness, satisfaction and well-being that were placed in opposite order at the same distance one from the other. Each questionnaire contained 63 'main' questions and 69 more 'sub-questions', and therefore it was easy to distance enough the questions on these three notions so as to exclude, or at least limit, the influence that the first answer may have on the following ones.

On the verbal scale, we find significant mean differences between happiness (4.97) and well-being (4.83) and between well-being and life satisfaction (4.92), whereas the notions of happiness and satisfaction do not show significant differences. But, even more interestingly, the determinants of the three notions appear to be different, and, within this phenomenon, there are also significant differences between genders.

Income[4] turns out to be very significantly relevant for all the three notions, but more as for well-being than for life satisfaction and for happiness: moreover, in all three cases, as income grows, its marginal significance decreases. This confirms the results of Clark et al. (2008) that provide a mathematical explanation

[2] A numerical scale with only negative values (from −7 to −1) have been presented by Davern and Cummins (2006) to measure dissatisfaction, (which is not really the same thing as our bipolar −3 to +3 scale to measure dissatisfaction and satisfaction on the same scale).

[3] First elaborations of the collected data are in Maffioletti et al. (2013)

[4] In spite of assured anonymity, almost half of the samples did not answer the question on family income. As a consequence we performed two sets of analysis: in the first, only individuals who provided information on family income are considered, in the second the whole sample is considered, not including the income variable among regressors, but adding, as a row proxy of income, self-reported satisfaction of subject's family on its overall economic condition.

of the Easterlin paradox[5] (i.e. the lack of correlation between income and happiness) in time-series analyses, and those of many recent studies—both for countries all together[6] and for Italy specifically[7]—that show that happiness is significantly positively related to income in cross-section analyses.

We also find that the factors that determine the positive side of the scale are different from those that determine the negative side: surely employment/unemployment and good/bad health seem to have this type of effect. Therefore—if the final results of our research are supposed to be also prescriptive for public policies[8]—it is necessary to understand whether these policies, to be as much effective as possible, should act (as far as possible) more on the factors that determine the positive side of self-reported happiness/life satisfaction/well-being—that seem to be more difficult to be affected—or on those that determine the negative side (Regional policies can affect strongly both health and employment).

Moreover, it is not clear whether factors valued positively and factors valued negatively, when adopting a self-valuation technique, counterbalance each other, or whether a negative valuation about a very important factor prevails on the valuation of any other in determining the 'all together' valuation, independently of the personal weight ascribed[9] to the factor(s) valued negatively. And, the other way round, does a negative valuation of one's life all together determine negative valuations of single factors? We have a hint of this coming from a parallel research led from our colleagues in Alessandria (based on the same questionnaires): high valuations of happiness and well-being are associated with positive valuations of public services: in which direction goes the cause–effect relation?

(b) As far as scales are concerned, the first question that shows up is if bipolar numerical scales are more reliable than unipolar numerical scales. It turns out that:

(b1) the mean answer as for *life satisfaction* expressed in the verbal scale was 4.92, whereas the mean answer in the numerical bipolar scale was 5.08.

(b2) the mean answer to the question on *happiness* expressed in the verbal scale was 4.97 while it was 4.83 when the numerical unipolar scale is used.

T test shows that both mean differences are statistically significant.

On the contrary, no significant difference emerged either between self-reported *well-being* in a verbal scale (mean 4.83) and in an numerical unipolar scale (mean 4.84) in questionnaire A, or between self-reported well-being in a verbal scale (mean 4.86) and in an numerical bipolar scale (mean 4.75) in questionnaire B.

These results are rather mixed and there is no conclusive argument neither for the reliability of numerical scales, nor for the preference that should be conferred to one type of scale or to the other: in all cases differences are (above

[5] See Easterlin (1973, 1974, 2005).

[6] Up to this moment, Stevenson and Wolfers (2013) is one of the most recent and convincing.

[7] See Scoppa and Ponzo (2008), ISTAT (2013).

[8] See Layard (2005, 2006).

[9] Self-reported, when answering questions such as "How important is it for you…".

or below) at the borderline of significance. But it is interesting to note that, when the differences are significant, the direction is the expected one: the unipolar scale underestimates valuations because of the mixed understanding of the low steps, up to the middle one (subject A may believe that even a '3' could represent correctly her being 'rather happy', being, anyhow, a positive value); the bipolar scale overestimates valuations, because of the fact that quite a number of respondents may not be at ease with negative numbers and therefore tend to ignore them and therefore consider only the numbers from 0 upwards as possible answers.

2.6 Conclusions

On the basis of our results we may conclude that:

(1) People do not consider 'happiness', 'life satisfaction' and 'well-being' as synonymous, and this is proven not only because the mean of self-valuations is significantly different, but also because the determinants of these three notions are different.
(2) The factors that determine the positive side of the scale are different from those that determine the negative side: some factors, such as employment and health determine self-reported happiness, life satisfaction and well-being only if negatively reported (i.e. unemployment and bad health), but not if they are reported positively. Public policies are probably bound to be more effective if intervening on the factors that determine unhappiness rather than on the factors that determine happiness, because the former ones seem to be more suitable to be affected by public policies.
(3) Income has a significant effect on self-reported happiness, life satisfaction and well-being, as spotted out by the prevailing literature in cross-section analysis, is confirmed. The marginal decrease of its significance is also confirmed.
(4) The use of different scales is relevant, but we did not find a conclusive answer neither to the question if numerical scales are fully reliable, nor—in case of a positive answer to this question—which, between a unipolar and a bipolar scale, is more reliable than the other.

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Chapter 3
Happiness-Freedom: Who Suffers? From *Dukkha* to *Samadhi*

Serge-Christophe Kolm

'Happiness is chewing the cud': thus spoke Zarathoustra according to Friedrich Nietzsche. The image of happiness thus is a ruminating cow, probably watching trains pass by to fight boredom (should the logo of happiness day or conferences be the label of the cheese 'The laughing cow'?). This has little dignity, honour or 'grandeur'. However, these later values have led to the worst catastrophes of mankind and to huge suffering.

Yet another Aryan wise man had proposed to see the problem upside down: 'I teach suffering, the cause of suffering and the extinction of all suffering', 'I am an analyst (*vibhajjavadi*, 'following the way of reason') and not a dogmatic (*ditthivadi*, 'following the way of what is said')', are two of the first sentences reported from the Buddha Siddharta Gautama Sakyamuni in the 99th *subha sutta* (*sutra*) of the *Abidhamma* (*Abidharma*), third part of the *tripitaka* (the 'triple basket' of the Pali canon).

Ruut Veenhoven wrote in one of his papers, 'happiness is so primarily a function of perceived discrepancy between reality and 'wants' (1997).

Venerable Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, master teacher monk of the Wat Mohkhabalarama (Khao Buddhong, Chaiya, Thailand) similarly professed to the *upasaka* just admitted: '*dukkha'* mainly results from experienced or feared unsatisfied desires'. Although from a different school, the Lamas Phajo of the Dzong of Punakha (Bhutan), Kunga of the Tibetology Institute of Gangtok (Sikkim) and of Nama Buddha (Nepal) did not speak differently.

We should first make the vocabulary clear. *Dukkha* (the Sanskrit term, *dukksha* in Pali) is classically translated as suffering, pain, unhappiness, ill-being, etc., according to the context, but more often simply as dissatisfaction. In the latter case, Buddhadasa's statement is practically tautological. Buddhism defines itself as the diminishing of *dukkha*. They add that if someone succeeds in diminishing her *dukkha* deeply and durably, she is a Buddhist even if she has never heard about the Buddha Sakyamuni (thinking, however, that this is very unlikely, that such gifted persons, if they exist, are extremely rare—Milarepa may have been of this kind). *Dukkha* is supposed to have a contrary, *sukkha* (from which comes 'sugar').

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SpringerBriefs in Well-Being and Quality of Life Research,
DOI: 10.1007/978-3-319-04744-7_3, © The Author(s) 2014

However, Buddhist philosophy-wisdom-therapy emphasizes *dukkha* and even often considered *sukkha* as describing a valuable but different dimension ('bitter-sweet' is possible). Moreover, there is a third concept, *piti*, conveniently translated as joy, or sentiment of joy or attitude of joy. Your actions and choices influence your *dukkha* (and your *sukkha*) but only indirectly and generally after some delay (through your *creation* of your capitalized *karma*). In contrast, you are supposed to be able to choose directly to be in a state of *piti*. And this is advised, not as an end in itself but as a means to know and form yourself better, by bringing the depth of you to the conscious observable surface and by making your mind and body more malleable. Thus joy-*piti* is not sought *per se* but as an indirect means to diminish suffering-dissatisfaction-*dukkha*. As a result, you sometimes can watch the surprising sight of joyful monks reciting the classical *mantras* and litanies of Buddhist pessimism: 'all is suffering, the world situation is becoming worse and worse (these times), *anicca*, *dukkha*, *anatta* (impermanence—i.e. nothing lasts—, suffering, inexistence—of selves), etc' which is also a strategy towards the same end. At any rate, in a sense, being happy (in spite of all that) is a condition for being able to become happy. This is one of the reasons for which 'the end of the way is the way itself', 'the aim of the travel is the travel itself'.

Ruut Veenhoven also criticizes the view he notes. He also met Buddhism in his investigation about what of the three philosophies of China 2000 years ago (Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism) could be of use for the modern world. His conclusion is negative, particularly for Buddhism. However, he notes that there are many types of Buddhism and that the result may be different for other kinds (also the first Chinese translations of the Sanskrit *sutras*, in the first century, shortly after the birth of *Mahayana* Buddhism, are notoriously defective—they could not face the difficulties raised by the enormous differences in the nature of these two languages: the second translations, in the seventh century, are much better). This multiplicity is right and in the very nature of Buddhism which says that it should adapt to the specificities of each person, place and culture. However, there is a common basic core. A Buddhist is seen as progressing in understanding and self-formation along a way towards a *dukkha*-free end. This end is the same for all schools which differ essentially by the kind of way to it they favour. For instance, Zen Buddhism is a limiting case by focussing directly and exclusively on meditative experience rather than intellectual analysis in a large first part of the way—it is only after some 10 years of sitting meditation that Deshimaru told his disciples 'there are also ideas'. In contrast, the *Theravada* schools of South-East Asia begin much earlier to teach psychological and philosophical theories and analyses, although varieties of meditative exercises are necessary to understand the meaning of all this by systematic guided introspection (*antarmukhi*, 'looking inside', which the *samadhi* experience—see below—finally turns over into the self-projection into the world of *bahirmukhi*, an 'extrojection' into *aham-idam*, 'I am that') and to benefit from the progress. These latter approaches are bound to suit better modern 'rationalists', who, however, may receive the no-self theory (see below) as a shock—a salutary one, though. Moreover, other traits emphasized by other traditions may also be suitable for a modern or 'Western' Buddhism which can adopt

them, for instance the altruism emphasized by *Mahayana*'s *Bodhisattvas* inspired by the Buddha's compassionate choice to 'come down from the mountain' to teach his discovery of the 'middle way' and of enlightenment to his fellow human beings in Sarnath deer park.

These topics are developed in my book *Happiness-Freedom (deep Buddhism and modernity)*, published in 1982 (in French) by the Presses Universitaires de France (651 pages).[1] The Buddhist translation of the title would transform the Westernly positive 'happiness' into the protective 'non-suffering', and the Western obsession of 'freedom' into the dynamic, processual and active 'liberation, since Buddhism also sees itself as the liberation (*moksha*, *moksa*) from unsatisfiable desires and from the illusion (illusion of social origin, *maya*, from which 'magic') of the 'self' towards the consciousness of selflessness, 'no-self' or no-I (*anatta* pali, *anatman* Sanskrit).

Hence, Buddhism sees what matters most as suffering and it sees itself as a therapy (the Buddha is also 'the great physician'). Suffering and dissatisfaction come from unsatisfied desires (at least one wants not to suffer). Catering for genuine basic needs is unavoidable. For the rest, the solution is to have no unsatisfiable desires. The best (consistent) way to obtain this is not to fight existing such desires, because this fight and repression is painful, but, rather, to control the birth of one's desires (*lub*, from which '*libido*' and 'love'). With respect to satisfiable desires, the various Buddhist schools have opposite positions. For the largest ones, these desires should also be prevented or checked, because the satisfaction of one desire leaves place for other new desires, and the succession of desires and their satisfaction is an agitation which is in itself painful like a burning fire which should better be extinct (extinction is *nirvana*, *nibbana*, that is 'no-wind' or no longer wind or agitation). They advise serenity over excitement. Other minority schools see no problem with satisfying satisfiable desires, and some, especially in tantrism, even advise to focus on this experience to enjoy and learn from it at most, and even propose to skilfully create such satisfiable desires in order to derive pleasure—*kama* (pleasure of the senses)—or happiness and psychological information from their satisfaction. In all cases, controlling the birth of one's desires is the key.

How can one get rid of or prevent a desire? All instances of the sentiment 'I want…' have one thing in common: 'the 'I' which (or who) wants'. If there is no such subject 'I', there can be no desire. David Hume once remarked that there are some people, across the Channel, on the continent, who believe that since they have thoughts, there exists such an 'I' who 'thinks'. He added that he tried to find such an I 'in himself', but failed. He met various things such as perceptions, sensations, conceptions, ideas, sentiments, emotions, consciousness of all that, etc., but nothing which could qualify as such an "I'. There is 'himself', aggregating all this with physical traits and materials, but this is a 'me', an object (and not a subject), a person (*pugdala* for Buddhists). Similarly Jean-Paul Sartre, in his biography of

[1] There are translations in Thai, Lao and Khmer, a partial translation in Japanese, a planned one in Mandarin, and translation of a part of one chapter in English in *The Multiple Self*, edited by Jon Elster, Cambridge University Press, pp. 233–265.

Gustave Flaubert, sees the writer as a dust of many small elements (the Buddhists' *dharmas*, *dhammas*), but did not find a 'self' as an intrinsic subject. It is noteworthy that René Descartes never wrote *cogito ergo sum* in his *Meditations* and *Discourses*, but *ego cogito, ergo sum*, with the addition *sive existo* in the latter case: he had to explicitly and emphatically introduce *ego* in the first place in order to be able to (or dare) find it in the conclusion. In my exchanges with knowledgeable Buddhists with the implicit reciprocity agreement that they would teach me some of their ideas, whereas I would tell them something about the philosophy of the invasive West, when I came to 'I think, therefore I am' (understood as 'I' is, there is an 'I'), I could see a faint smile on their lips, which, for such self-mastered people, is equivalent to loudly bursting out laughing, with gentle but ironic and rather condescending compassion (*karuna*) for such improbable reasoning. If 'I think' one can only conclude that there exists a thought which, along with other thoughts and other mental and physical elements in causal influences between themselves and with other elements can constitute a person, but certainly not that there is somewhere some stuff, called 'I', engaged in the action or state of thinking, that a sane mind can only see a preposterous, rather ludicrous and ultimately dangerous kind of conception. Perhaps Descartes only 'discovered' that the person Mr. R. D. existed. His 'I exist' may not be as gross as "'I' exists" would be. But, then, a punch on the nose would have provided a sufficient proof, and a better one since suffering is the surest thing whose existence is ascertained—in Buddhist view. For Buddhists, suffering and the instance 'I suffer' exist, but there is no 'I' who or which suffers. What is basically emphatically denied is the 'transcendental I' of some Western philosophers.

However, people may believe that they have such a self subject. This is an illusion of social origin (*maya*) instilled by society starting with education. But reasoning supported by the appropriate mental exercises (*dyanas* pronounced in Chinese *chan* that the Japanese understood as *zen*) in which attention (*manasikara*) is applied with varied successive intensities (*dharanas*), objects, scopes from *ekagrata–ekagrya* ('in only one point') to overall, durations, clarity, neatness or fuzziness, efforts, voluntariness or spontaneity, with more or less consciousness (*satipattha*) or in the unconscious (*vasana*), with or without duality (*dvaita*, from *dva* = 2, I and the rest), analytical deconstructions or syntheses, recollections (*patiloman*), repetitions, rhythms, etc.,[2] under the guidance of a knowledgeable teacher, can make one more or less convinced that one's impression of a problematic self is *sunna*, *sunya*, that is, empty, or more precisely hollow or, more exactly, inflated or swollen (painfully so). Then, desires lose their anchor and can rather easily be waved away. This is the great liberation (*mahamoksa*) from this illusion and from the ties it induces. Selflessness (*anatta*, *anatman*) and emptiness (*sunata*, *sungata*) away from ignorance (*avidiya*, non-view), hence from greed (*gredha*, thirst) and thus from dissatisfaction.

This central way, however, requires a few qualifications. First, a few desires, pains and pleasures can be used in this process as 'skilful means' (*upaya marga*)

[2] See Chap. 13 ('practise') of *Happiness-Freedom*.

using obstacles as supports (or 'transforming poison into nectar' in Japan)—tantric iconography shows embracing personages trampling the skulls of dead desires underfoot. Second, the pains that serve as warning about bodily (or mental) injuries should be carefully considered and minimally kept. Third, there are other kinds of self-concepts that have existence and meaning.[3] In particular, what is common to all verbs in the first person singular describing actions or states (I eat, I walk, I rest, I think, etc.) is the 'inductive I' (*asmitan* Sanskrit, from *asmi*, 'I am', conveniently translated as I-am or Im). Its existence by no means implies that of an I-in-itself. The 'I-in-itself' is inconceivable, *anirvacaniya* (but not ineffable nor unspeakable). Yet a sentiment of it can exist (*ahamkara* or 'enunciation of I'). This I-in-itself is *atta*, *atman*, in the nature of nothingness. There is also the 'reflexive self', that is, the set of elements of a person such as ideas-of, conceptions-of, consciousness-of, or sentiments-towards, which refer to this very person. However, reflexive consciousness is accompanied by a more or less intense sentiment of I, the 'tied I' (i.e. the Sanskrit tantric *butatman*) which tends to misguide the mind. Hence, the person, me, is but a mental formation (p. *sankhara*, s. *samskara*)—as any conceived object is—and the proper I is an illusion. What remains of the self?

Given the particular overwhelming importance of individualism in the *ethos* of modernity, and of the ensuing diseases—the 'egalgies' of egoism, envy, loneliness, swollen egos, etc.—in this culture, the philosophical, psychological, practical (practice), ontological and moral lessons of Buddhist egology are probably the teachings most needed to foster modern 'happiness'. But is this medicine possible? Is not the no-self too exotic, too foreign, too far away from modern conceptions to be able to permeate them? However, since modernity probably already ultimately owes to Buddhism (and Jainism, a sister Indian philosophy), its idea of the primacy of the individual over cultures and politics, by the intermediary of hellenistic philosophies and, in particular, stoicism and from it Christianity (plus the Renaissance and Enlightenment philosophies), the estrangement gap may not be actually that large and the completion of the lesson may be a possibility.[4] From this India, stoicism kept the individual and self-formation (theory and methods) but forgot the no-self. Then from stoicism Christianity kept the individual (with a personal relation to God) but largely forgot self-formation (which competes with a universal Creator). Could not this travel be retraced? The main difficulty is, rather, sociological in nature: since this transmission has to be from person to person, from a knowledgeable one who adapts the teaching to the specificities of a student who is transformed in the process, with information and practice for awareness and training, and cannot be done through general publication or mass media information, the problem is the too small number of available teachers in societies which do not have this tradition of education from childhood.

What *anatta* (*anatman*) denies is the existence of *atta* (*atman*). This latter term is classically translated as soul. But if there is no soul, what passes, what

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[3] See Chap. 19 of *Happiness-Freedom*.

[4] See chaps 16, 17 and 18 *Happiness-Freedom*.

can pass, from a body to another in transmigration-reincarnation-metempsychosis? This seems to be a basic contradiction at the core of Buddhist thought. This has been noticed and considered as the strongest criticism of Buddhism. However, all Buddhist thinking or expression is to be understood at two (or more) levels, they have a number of meanings. As a Buddhist advances on the way of knowledge, self-formation (and cure of worldly diseases), he has access to new meanings, he passes from the lower to the higher meaning, from *nitartha* to *neyartha*. A few billion Hindu and Buddhist devotees believe in metempsychosis in the litteral sense. This may help them live, or at least live correctly: if they are sufficiently non-naughty, their good (proper to their present embodiment in Hinduism) acts build them a favourable *karma* asset which grants them that, after death, they will be reborn as a person, animal or god (deity) in a less dreadful situation. Hence they are responsible for their fate (by their past deeds) and can only blame themselves if they do not like it. This acts as a belief in Paradise with the charitable second (and further) chance of the possibility of compensating present misbehaviour by virtuous later lives for the *karma* accounting. This also induces them not to mistreat (nor eat) animals or gods (which could be their grandmother; they notice with surprise that some other uninformed people not only are non-vegetarians but even sometimes also want to eat and drink their god). Advanced Buddhists evaluate the truth content of this story as most Westerners do. They call it superstition but without scorn, appreciating that hope in better future lives may help people late in the way stand the hardships of the present one. But they also know the other, truer meaning of this fable.

This is a psychological metaphor or, rather, theory since there are very precise details, describing the working of the mind, its dynamics, with this samsaric vocabulary (*samsara* = flow, wandering—from life to life). A life stands for a state of the mind. The story describes how the mind passes from one state to another, and so on. Given a state, there comes a focus on one aspect or detail which is characteristic of the next state which builds up around it. This process occurs in 3, 5, 7, 12 or 17 very fast stages which are represented in the iconography of mandalas and described in the 'books of the dead' (such as the Tibetan '*Bardo Thödol*') and which people who have received sufficient training to slow down their mind process can be aware of and more or less influence. What one is at a point in time, and in particular one's happiness or unhappiness then, depends very much on one's past actions whose effects built up as one's *karma* (from *kri*, to create), and the process also permits self-creation. This is the dynamics of the 'wandering mind' (Descartes) and wisdom is taming this 'crazy monkey of the mind'. This applies, in particular, to ideas, to mental representations and images, to moods, to emotions, to desires and to the alternate successions of desires and actions. This birth and rebirth of desires is the pain of life and its ceasing is the extinction (*nirvana*, *nibbana*) of this burning fire. When 'actual', biological life ceases, this is a non-problem, a vacuous question to which one can give no better answer than 'a noble silence' ('if an arrow hits you, take care of removing the arrow and of the wound rather than worrying about who threw it': questions are worth being answered only if this contributes to attenuate *dukkha*). This death,

which is generally a scandal when it is someone else's, is a non-event when it is your own (you will no longer be here to regret or deplore it). The *samsara* tale is first of all a reference guide and a lexicon for the progressant. The mild and mundane hedonic lessons from it are rather of the type that, all considered, anxiety is a priori likely to be a more harmful disease than depression, and excitement tends to be a lesser blessing than elation especially in the selfless non-dual (no self versus the rest of the world) enstatic steady flow experience of any of the 40 types of *samadhi* ('synthesis', *satori* in Japanese, and *bhava*—'the state'—in Tibetan).

Even if one is not fortunate enough to reach this enlightenment experience, or if one does not want to want it because this still would be wanting, just walking along this path is beneficial. It is likely to affect the pilgrim into a Buddhist personality (both hard and smooth, as a polished rock or a skull) which is the safest protection to block or deviate attacks of unhappiness. 'There exists the travel but not the traveller', 'the aim of the way is but the way itself', as they say. Moreover, even some training, formation and information in this direction equips the progressant with the means needed to follow the mundane rules of life advocated by Buddhism, such as: choosing the middle way (intense right moderation); respect for life; non-anger (none of the 47 types of anger, the worst being that represented by the Tibetan goddess *Tara*); non-violence (*ahimsa*, shared with Jainism—which taught Gandhi—but not by other Indian philosophies such as Vedism or Brahmanism except when the latter learned it from the former two); fearlessness; the four altruistic sentiments including *sila* (non-noxiousness to others, good conduct), *metta* (amity) and especially *karuna* (a very rich kind of compassion)—both Pali and Sanskrit have the same term, *mudhita*, to denote the pleasure one derives from the pleasure one gives to others—; aesthetic contemplation to ingest and more or less become, or create, beauty; all of which make for a less unhappy society.

Hence, the treasury of knowledge and methods that Buddhism has developed for its objective of diminishing suffering and dissatisfaction is also very efficient for these intermediate objectives. It can also be for other aims. Some of them can even be the opposite of Buddhist ends. In particular, these psychological methods and information have been the basis of a number of Asian 'martial arts'? It is all right when they are the non-lethal self-defence techniques used by monks travelling alone between isolated monasteries (including the 'skilful means' using the adversary's strength and one's weakness to win). But these methods have also been the basis of the training which permitted Japanese 'bushis' to become artistic expert murderers with a variety of weapons. Fortunately, these knowledge and methods are also efficient for more commendable objectives. Actually, they are for any human activity. But they are particularly for simply knowing the human psyche in various situations. Indeed, Buddhist meditative methods are particularly useful for practicing perceptive and systematic introspection. Introspection is the central focus of criticism from many Western social scientists influenced by 'behaviourism' (which states that the only way to know the mind is to observe bodily reactions). What they call introspection, however, is essentially folk psychology informed by repeated observations of oneself and of others that we think we can understand (notably by imagining oneself in their situation). This is

by no means negligible. Actually, Western psychologists use introspection in the first place to choose and set up their experiments. But the Buddhist *antarmukhi* (looking inside) is something different. It is the systematic use of attention to investigate one's psychic life. The various types of mental elements are very carefully characterized and distinguished. Their relations are analysed. Mental experiments are made to watch the effects of mental or physiological inputs-stimuli. These experiments are reproducible by the same person or by other individuals. Meditative techniques are also very useful for understanding more global and complex phenomena, notably involving important issues of meaning. In particular, they permit eliminating extraneous interferences of facts, other than the ones one wants to focus on, to observe the 'pure' phenomena, to achieve the philosophical *epoché*.

Another discipline that emphasizes satisfaction is standard economic theory. It explains individuals' choices by that which provides the highest possible satisfaction. It represents satisfaction by a 'utility function'. For instance $u(c)$ is the satisfaction provided by consumption c (measured here as a quantity), where $u()$ is usually assumed to be an increasing function. Economics would then focus on these effects of variations of c. Various philosophies or wisdoms, including Buddhism, would rather emphasize, to influence satisfaction, trying to modify function u. This results from a control of one's hedonic psychology obtained by the appropriate types of reflection and exercises called 'meditation'. If this activity is measured by its duration m, this becomes a parameter of function $u(c)$ which can now be written as $u(m, c)$. Derivatives of functions will be denoted, classically, by the function with the variable as lower index. Then, $u_c > 0$ and $u_m > 0$. In particular, when this meditation results in deriving more satisfaction from this consumption, in enjoying it more, it is 'sybaritic meditation' (for instance, epicurianism in hellenistic philosophies and tantrisms in the Hindo-Buddhist world—the Buddhist tantric school inspired a tantric school in Bengali Hinduism whose extremist 'left-tantrism' branch includes chaktism which produced the famous 'sutra of the pleasures of the senses (*kama*)'). Then, m is written as s. The duration of consumption can also be explicitly considered, and sometimes added to sybaritic meditation time (savouring consumption). u_c is the increase in satisfaction derived per unit of a small increase in c. One thus normally has $u_{cs} > 0$. However, Buddhism focuses, more than on increased satisfaction, on lower dissatisfaction. When c is lower, u_c is the decrease in satisfaction per unit of a small decrease in c (if they are the same u_c, i.e. if function $u(c)$ is differentiable). Another type of meditation permits limiting dissatisfaction caused by lower c. This is 'ascetic meditation', measured by its duration a (basic Buddhism, and notably stoicism in hellenistic philosophies). Then, $u = u(a, c)$, and $u_{ca} < 0$. Synthetically, the sensitivity of satisfaction to consumption is augmented by sybaritic meditation and diminished by ascetic meditation. However, dissatisfaction from a decrease in c is frequently higher than satisfaction from an increase of the same amount in c, notably because of 'attachments' (including habits, addictions, etc.)—there could be opposite effects (from novelty, surprise, learning, etc.) but they are likely to be less important. Then, denoting as u_c^- and u_c^+ the two derivatives for lower and

higher c respectively, $u_c^- > u_c^+$. This is one (hedonic) reason for emphasizing more ascetic than sybaritic meditation. Moreover, sybaritic meditation and consumption may have the effect of reinforcing these dangerous attachments. This dissymmetry is also one of the reasons favouring steady happiness rather than fluctuations in it (ataraxy, nirvana). Finally, consumption c may have to be earned with some labour ℓ (measured here by its duration) with $c = p\ell$ where p is the productivity of labour. The economic problem is to allocate one's time between labour to provide consumption and 'meditation' m to master the satisfaction derived from consumption. With $u = u(m, c)$, the most satisfactory choice satisfies $u_c \cdot p = u_m$ or $u_c / u_m = 1/p$: the rate of substitution of meditation for consumption should be equal to the inverse of the wage rate (which tends to yield higher meditation per consumption or income for lower wage rates for given meditative capacities). Sakyamuni experienced both very high c (in his youth at his father's palace) and very low c (for 7 years of intense ascetic meditation, with the story of one grain of rice a day)—life-long, $\ell = 0$, first as a prince, then as a beggar. He discovered that both these excesses were unsatisfactory, and, persuaded that the same applies to other people, came to teach that the optimum lies in between, the 'middle way'.

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Chapter 4
Happiness, Dharma and Economics

Roberto Burlando

4.1 Introduction

The more general translation of the Sanskrit term Dharma is simply Ethics, or Ethical code. So, at the more general level, the title of this chapter could be read as 'Ethics and economics', which is far from a new topic. However this theme seems to be again popular, as it often happens in the face of enduring crises, and old wisdoms might offer positive insights even into new realities.[1]

Ethics (when taken seriously and not just as something to pay lip service to at the political and economic levels or as a quick fix at the personal one), remind us of the very basic questions that have interested man, questions concerning the very meaning of our lives and activities, including economic ones.

To some extent the vast literature on happiness has posed similar questions in asking whether producing, earning and consuming more has provided us with greater happiness. I will not enter here, the various debates that have risen as a consequence of the negative answer to that question, despite the interest of some of them (I might come back to some later on, however). Here I would simply like to point that crises tend to make many of us think[2] and, possibly, to get us 'back to basics'.[3] In turn this sometimes leads us to realize that many of the things that we do and pursue do not seem to have much sense any more, more so when we look at the things we do at the general, societal, level. Often individuals find themselves forced into activities they simply know how to do and get rewarded to do, without questioning their real usefulness or consequences (for everyone, including the doer), and what seems lacking is the capability to overlook the working of the

[1] Incidentally, this consideration reminds of the title of a book by his Holiness the Lama (1999).

[2] This, of course, reminds of the psychological phenomenon at the individual level called 'cognitive dissonance' that has been studied also by the economist and Nobel laureate Akerlof.

[3] Interesting considerations along this line stem also from the socio-psychological literature on life tasks (See Cantor et al. 1987; Cantor and Harrow 1994).

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entire system and see if its direction is sound or not, for each of us, and—in the negative case—to diagnose and correct that way of working. In the opinion of a number of authors,[4] this has also to do with the transformation that has occurred (after the Second World War) to economics, a change from an ethically oriented social science[5] (as it used to be) to a separate (from all other social sciences and from a broad philosophical approach) and pretended ethically and value 'neutral' approach[6] and with its new status of a sort of 'new religion'.[7]

Contemplative knowledge has led many to the same conclusions at the personal level, and has often associated enduring happiness with ethical behaviour and conduct in life. Enduring happiness, however, is different from the perceptions of it (or its social representations[8]), and one of the great merits of contemplative knowledge lies in the help it provides to many of us to distinguish between the two.

The same is being done, and also for quite a long time (though with alternate prescriptions and success) in philosophy. Aristotle is well known for his writings on many subjects, including the ones in which he related economics to politics and (at the very core of any human endeavour in his view) to moral philosophy, whose main aim is the pursuit of the greatest good of all, happiness, which he termed *Eudaimonia* (see especially the Nicomachean Ethics). Aristotle's approach is known also as 'Ethics of Virtues' and, as it is well known, it is still considered among the three main ones in moral philosophy (although current mainstream economics seems often to know of, recognize and/or accept only one of then, a particular hedonistic form of consequentialism termed utilitarianism). The Greek philosopher turned down at the very beginning of his reflections the possibilities of 'reducing *eudaimonia*' to the pursuit of material goods, pleasure and desires or preferences and honours, these being either means instead of ends or transient attractions, not leading to true happiness. These days we are witnessing a renewed interest in this approach even by a good number of economists, thanks in particular to the work of contemporary philosopher Martha Nussbaum and economist Amartya Sen, who have developed Aristotle's principles into what is now known as the 'Capability approach'.

The title of this chapter, however, can be read and dealt also at a more specific level, as Dharma is a specific term summarizing in itself a specific, though very

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[4] See, for instance, Nussbaum (2011), Sen (1977, 2011), Singer (1993), Nelson and Stackhouse (2001), Hausmann (1992a, b).

[5] See Sen (1987), Chap. 1. An ethical orientation—despite the common suggested interpretation—is also very much present in the writings of the 'father' of modern economics, Adam Smith (see Evensky 1993).

[6] See Sen (1987) and Daly and Cobb (1989). Myrdal was one of the first, in the last century, to question the pretence of neoclassical economics to provide a value-free approach.

[7] See for instance Nelson and Stackhouse (2001), Dussel et al. (2000).

[8] Prof. Ruut Veenhoven has given us—earlier in the conference—a broad overview of what he termed 'the classical beliefs about the ways to reach happiness' and how they apply today, and has made some general points. Each individual, though, and different categories of individuals according to activity and orientation might have different and more specific views/beliefs on the point.

broad, approach ethics, with a long historical background and some interesting implications. My curiosity first and then readings and research into the various ethical approaches has led me, quite a number of years ago, to look also at the Eastern traditions[9] and to meet the most famous of their Ethical codes, Dharma,[10] which is associated both with the Yoga, Zen, Taoism and other various Buddhist traditions.[11]

The main aim of this chapter is to suggest a number of reflections on economics that spring from this particular ethical approach and from some comparisons of it with the main western ones.

4.2 Sanatana Dharma and Swadharma

The conceptual (theoretical, to use the economists' jargon) framework of this approach is centred on a fundamentally evolutionary conception of life in all its forms (from the Universe to human beings and further along to animals, flora, etc.). At the more general level the ethical code (*Sanatana Dharma*) is maintained to correspond to the way things and relations really are when they are seen in their full reality, beyond the illusions created by the mind (in this sense it is considered as an ontological order[12]). This 'true' reality is seen as a cosmic order (of the same nature of thermodynamic laws), which in time imposes itself and its consequences. This order, as Eudaimonia in Aristotle's conception, is what all things tend to. It is not only 'as an extrinsic ordering on the nature of things, rather as its fundamental ontological structure' (Panikkar 2006, p. 28).[13]

At the human level this order implies the need to behave according to the rules (that can be termed moral in this particular meaning) deriving from such

[9] Here I can only name some of the western authors who have directed me in this direction, like Campbell and Eliade, and some of those who helped me in understanding more the Yoga tradition, like Brunelli and Diwan. I have also been attracted by the reflections of another western philosopher, Jullien, who dedicated a large part of his life to study Chinese philosophy, but for some reasons (still unclear to me, besides the later encounter with his writings) to a much lesser extent.

[10] To be clear with respect to my further reflections, I want to clarify that I was not looking—neither am I now—for a specific, and different, religious approach with respect to the traditional western Christian ones. I have always been interested in comparing different traditions in order to see whether such a comparison could lead to recognize universal values and to a deeper understanding of those of each specific approach, as in the centuries many different versions of the same have created (in my view) quite a confusion and the principle of authority does not seem enough to guide proper open choices.

[11] The chapter by prof. Kolm (as some of his previous work) moves from and in such last traditions.

[12] Panikkar (2006) (page 31 in the Italian edition. All the quotes from it are my translations).

[13] This reading of nature has a western correspondent in the ancient Greek concept of *physis* that has been maintained and elaborated within a relevant philosophical approach which includes Aquinas, Ficino, Pico della Mirandola, Bruno and Campanella among others, and that has been re-proposed recently by Catholic theologian Mancuso (see Mancuso 2007). In this view nature is the seen as the birthplace of 'Being' and it has an inner tendency (*telos*) which is exercising an influence also on human beings.

homeostatic order, which has relevant feedback mechanisms (usually summarized in the term *karma* and leading, possibly, to some form of equilibrium—again to use the economists' jargon—but also to possible extreme solutions, particularly at the individual or single State level) that make it unavoidable. In the words of Panikkar (2006, p. 29) '… *morality and all positive values acquire value and reality because of their being expression of such order, which is not an external law imposed on people but the very true nature of things as seen in its dynamic and hierarchical aspect*'.

This connection between the general order and the individual (and, further up, group) behaviour has its specification at each level, connecting the past (accumulated karma) with the present and the future and interacting with the conditions prevailing around. Time and circumstances, phase of life and evolutionary level all contribute to define one's place in the world order[14] and, consequently, her/his personal duty, which is termed *swadharma* (and is often referred to as an 'inner call' from one's destiny, another specification of the term *karma)* and is a specification at the personal level of the cosmic code, as it corresponds to the '*ontological place of each individual in the scale of beings*'.

In my view, this framework provides a peculiar unifying treatment of the three main different western ethical approaches because it clearly moves from a deontological standing point (in particular men have duties and, correspondingly, rights that both can be considered 'natural[15]') but it includes also the consideration of the consequences of each action taken at any level (though not in the utilitarian and certainly not in the simple hedonistic[16] way) and it deals with the ways for reaching happiness (in a sense similar to the Aristotelian *eudaimonia*).

In this view, as in Aristotle, clearly happiness is self-realization—or, to use Sen terms, the translation of personal capabilities into functionings.

Dharma, though, pinpoints four main areas of and for self-realization: ethical behaviour in itself (*dharma*), well-being (*artha*), pleasure of worldly realization (*kama*) and of human self-refinement (moksa[17]). Each person has his/her own individual evolutionary path but, although this journey is strictly personal, we all follow similar steps,[18] though possibly in a different order, at different times and each of us in his/her own way. Therefore, each of us have different aims

[14] This is the result of the combination of her/his evolutionary level (in Hinduism this is generally translated into the idea of caste, and these are mistakenly considered as fixed in a lifetime instead of as signposts), phase of life and circumstances (up to a point summarized in the levels of her/his categories).

[15] Contrary, for instance, to Bentham famous statement that the idea of natural rights is a 'nonsense on stilts'.

[16] However it may be worth, here, to notice that Epicurus's thought has been distorted in the centuries to represent, in the common usage of the term deriving from his name, almost the opposite of what he meant.

[17] This can also be (and indeed it is in many authors) interpreted as spiritual achievement up to the point of reaching non-human levels.

[18] Such 'ethical physiology' is supposed to be the source of the so-called Archetypes which, when matured by the individual, spring spontaneously producing the discovery of the same values and truths. See Brunelli (2001).

(life-tasks) and different reaches to pursue, and these are personal specifications of the (just mentioned) general life aims.

Interesting enough, these aims cannot be reduced to a single measure or scale (utility or money or whatever), neither can they be compared across. There is a peculiar type of hierarchy among them, however, as any further one has to be built on the previous ones and further developments usually require a deepening in achievements on each of them. In this view, life is seen as a multidimensional reality, and so are its aims, irreducible to any single measure.

To complete this brief summary of the approach it is necessary to clarify the conception of phases of life, categories and of evolutionary levels. For both descriptive and prescriptive purposes, human life is subdivided into different stages[19] (four main ones: infanthood, adulthood, retirement and renunciation) characterized by quite different tasks, desires, commitments and even way of looking at life itself. For the same reasons, our reality is divided into five categories: physical body, mind, conscience, relationships and natural environment. Again each of us might be better positioned in any of them but enduring life progresses require ameliorations in each one, in order to have a balanced life.

Finally, progresses in self-realization at the human level also follow a path (a sort of evolutionary physiology) that presents a strict hierarchy corresponding to the various relational dynamics that are being built and explored by individuals and their social groupings.[20] It moves from the fundamental but lesser level of responsibility, that with respect to oneself, and moves on to greater levels as the family one, and then to the small community and up to the whole mankind and all living creatures and environment.

The precise hierarchy here reflects the fact that each person has to realize him/herself at the lower dynamic before properly and fruitfully move to higher ones. A non-realized person (in the sense described previously which is far from the usual, financial, meaning attributed to the term) at the individual level will normally make a poor spouse and parent and a troubled member of a community. Further dynamics imply higher degree of responsibility and of a disposition to serve others and the common good, not to take advantage of them. All the shortcuts and misuses of individual achievements will create the conditions for troubles and falls along the path. By contrast, appropriate behaviour and efforts may lead a person to climb various evolutionary steps within a lifetime.[21]

Dharma is summarized in a number of principles that are both general principles of life itself, in the sense of the way in which real life (behind the veil of ignorance and illusion, Maya, created by the unquiet mind is) and prescriptions for

[19] This looks similar to the psychological theories of life stages, like that of Erikson (1963, 1982).

[20] Cantor et al. (1987, 1992), Cantor and Harrow (1994) term these as meta-tasks on the long run, defined in the sphere of the relationships between the individual and his/her more significant social relations and the environment in which they all live.

[21] This is clearly the opposite with respect to the idea that one's birth defines his/her caste for the entire lifetime.

a better life and an evolution at the individual level divided into two groups: limitations (*yama*) and observances (*niyama*):

The main limitations are[22]: (i) non-violence (*aihmsa,* which at its best is the absence of any desire to hurt anyone in any possible way); (ii) truthfulness and transparency (*satya*); (iii) honesty (*asteya*, absence of even the desire to appropriate of someone else's belongings); (iv) the proper use of each individual's inner energy (in accordance with own phase of life and evolutionary condition, *brahmacarya*); (v) limitation in the desire of possession (*aparigraha,* i.e. not desiring more than is enough for a good life).

The main observances are: (i) purity (external and internal, *sauca*); (ii), being content (being satisfied with what one has, as this leads to mental stillness, *santosh*); (iii) austerity (moderation with respect to ones own body, language, mind, etc., *tapas*); (iv) search for Truth (both inside us and in our culture, *svadhyaya*); (v) surrender to the cosmic order (respecting it and all life, *Isvar-pranidhan*).

4.3 Dharma and Mainstream Economics

Many of the principles (if not all of them) named before are also part of the ethical code of most 'true' religions and spiritual schools. Instead they are (clearly enough) rather at odds with some explicit or implicit tenets of mainstream economics. Let us consider briefly only some of these principles, as a proper consideration of each of them will demand quite a long discussion. Obviously, non-possession is the opposite of the non-satiety assumption of traditional consumer theory, which is also included among the axioms of rational choice theory. On the other hand, generalized transparency (full and symmetrically distributed information) is a formal requirement of 'proper' perfect competition, but this entire old notion has been substituted by the idea that competition means basically that everyone should be free to do all what he wants on the markets, possibly without rules (the deregulation process aimed in this direction), and that moreover perfect completion is a 'good' (or the best) approximation to reality, better than the more complicated assumptions of oligopolistic or monopolistic competition.

As to violence, today's mainstream economic theory seems to be silent with respect to this point, simply leaving any consideration of this sort to the prevailing legal systems. However in various versions of mainstream economics, these are judged against their effectiveness in enhancing the level of production, which in turn is assumed to be the best proxy for well-being. Any limit to the possibility of expansion in production (i.e. economic growth) is therefore considered negatively and the vulgarized and diffused view of mainstream economics is that 'economic laws' demand market freedom in the form of the absence of any rule or ethical principle. A number of mainstream theorists have even maintained that neoclassical economics is value-free as its concept of efficiency does not depend on any

[22] *Patanjali,* considers these five *yama* and five *niyama*, while other authors discuss ten and ten.

assumption at this or at the ethical levels. This is clearly not true, unless one is willing to assume that utilitarianism (possibly in its more recent and axiomatic versions) is the only and true moral philosophy, which is even more clearly false. In my view there is a lot of violence both in the exclusion of any ethical vision different from utilitarianism and in the view that production is all that matters or in the tenet that it is a good proxy for well-being. A further violence (perhaps due to ignorance, but nevertheless quite concrete) has to be associated with the traditional tenet—incorporated also into the instrumental rationality approach associated with neoclassical economics—that aims and means are separated. According to both the deontological approach in moral philosophy and the ethics of Virtues the two are connected and within Dharma no lasting good can come from the use of pretended ethical means. The use of the rhetoric device of impersonal market forces generally amounts simply to try and defend one's private interests under the cover of an apparently more respectable worldview and to avoid the responsibility to make explicit ethical choices.

A related consideration is that the ideology of market freedom incorporates a very reduced notion of freedom, as many authors have shown.

In the words of contemporary US philosopher Anderson: *'the most important ideal that the modern market attempts to embody is a particular concept of freedom…[that] consists in having a large menu of choices in the marketplace and in exclusive power to use and dispose of things and services in the private sphere without having to ask permission from anyone else'* (Anderson 1990, pp. 180–181). In her view, this implies a quite limited idea of freedom, basically reduced to the freedom from the obligations with respect to others. *But '..we are not free to pursue the goods of deepest significance to human life under these conditions* (202–203). And *Democratic freedom [..] is freedom to participate in collective decisions. It is a freedom to be included, rather than to exclude others'*.

These considerations make it clear that *'the difficult task for modern societies is to reap the advantages of the market while keeping its activities confined to the goods proper to it'* (*p.* 204). These are what economists used to term, using a technical meaning, private goods, to distinguish them from various other types of goods for which markets are not suitable, as they have the property to transform (and corrupt) their vey nature: personal goods (like friendship, sexuality, etc.), democratic political goods (voting) as well as fundamental human rights and public and common goods. These considerations have been known recently as the arguments for the ethical limitations to the markets.

In the view of many, especially after the financial crisis of 2007–2008, it is also necessary to define proper rules, designed in the interest of all (and not of just a small number of powerful players) for the working of the markets. Mainstream economics tends to suggest a vision of markets as 'natural' and therefore neutral instruments, but as any lawyer knows markets and contracts are made up of a large set of rules defined in legal codes and their interpretation and/or revision has often to do with prevailing private interests.

Similar arguments, on the proper limits that the working of the markets should face, have been recently suggested by another well-known US philosopher, Sandel (2012),

and by others, while the reflections on the limited conception of freedom incorporated in free-market ideology can be complemented with the distinction between negative and positive conceptions of freedom. This old distinction (Constant already wrote about it) has been in recent years the focus of reflections by Berlin and Sen, among others. Sen (1997) maintains that both are important but clearly the positive notion is less well known in these times, while the individual freedom should be a social commitment. He maintains that *'freedom in itself does not constitute an argument in the utilitarian calculations. To the contrary, in some cases the utilitarian prescriptions clashed with the requests of individual freedom'. 'Conflicts of this type emerge [..] due to the paternalistic component implicit in the pretence to organize a society in a way to lead people to reach maximum utility instead of leaving them freedom of choice'.*

The connection between the instrumental rationality argument and the limited notion of freedom lies in the already mentioned pretenses of neoclassical economics to be able to define a value-free concept of efficiency and that this can be used as a general criterion for choosing in any economic situation.[23]

A well-known historian, Lash, pointed out, in a book by the self-explicating title *The revolt of the elites and the betrayal of democracy* (1994), that starting from the 1980s the world elites have been using the markets and the free-market argument only in order to accumulate more wealth for themselves, without paying any consideration to the consequences of their actions, including the collapse of democracy (whose health is instead at the very core of the US—as well as of other countries'—Constitution).

4.4 Happiness, Dharma and Economic Policies

Clearly, nowadays the dissatisfaction with current economic and social conditions is very high, and it is accompanied by a perceived large distance between them and their representations, as provided by traditional indicators, in particular GNP. We are not only witnesses of the Easterlin paradox but also of the failure of consumerism to produce any real increase in happiness.[24] This is not a denial of the relevance of income and disposition of goods that make life less hard and more enjoyable, rather it is a refusal of the assumption that these are the only sources of happiness and that they are good substitutes for other life dimensions.

The principle of non-possession tells us more in this direction and it runs against the very idea of consumerism. It requires the conscious[25] choice of avoiding the desire to possess what is not needed for my (austere) well-being and that of my family, especially when others are in need of that. This principle is very similar to the recent notion of voluntary simplicity.

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[23] Sen (1987) considers this a very dangerous evolution, related to the unsound extension of the 'engineering' approach within economics from the consideration of the proper means to reach scopes defined before economics to the very definition of the scopes themselves.

[24] See the many discussions on consumerism presented in the references.

[25] Diwan (2001c, p. 116).

The final (and revised) report of the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress (set by ex France President Sarkozy and led by leading economists Stiglitz, Sen, Fitoussi, 2009), for instance, recognized (point 66) that '*Quality of life is a broader concept than economic production and living standards. It includes the full range of factors that makes life worth living, reaching beyond its material side. While some extensions of economic accounting allow including some of the elements that shape quality of life in conventional measures of economic well-being, all approaches based on resources (or on people's command over commodities) remain limited in important ways*'.

A simple comparison between GDP and another mono-dimensional indicators (though corrected for the main GDP shortcomings) like GPI shows that while the former keeps growing, though at lesser and lesser rates, the latter is declining—at least in most countries and certainly in most of the developed ones—since the mid-1970s. This seems to imply that we are still producing—and even more, counting—more material (and financial) goods and services but deriving from it a reduction in progress and well-being.

As resources appear to be an inadequate metric for quality of life, the question becomes which other metric should be used for assessing quality of life, and the Commission clearly recognizes that this depends on the philosophical perspective taken. The Commission concentrated its attention first on the limits of GDP and then on the existing approaches that appear useful in thinking about the measurement of quality of life. They are those: (i) based on the notion of *subjective well-being*, which has been developed in close connection with psychological research; (ii) rooted in the notion of *capabilities* (that we already mentioned); (iii) based on the notion of *fair allocations.*

Clearly, at least the latter two have a fundamental ethical component, while the first leaves at least the space for that degree of individual freedom that 'maximising' approaches do not take into consideration (as argued before quoting Sen).

According to Dharma and the capability approach, happiness has to do with the realization of ones' life tasks and his/her human potential, associated with the recognition of the limits that human nature poses to all of us and to our realizations.[26] Clearly the realization of this requires a significant transformation, one that can only be led by individuals that follow personal ethical principles (svadharma) in their everyday choices and lives and recognize in their life aims that go well beyond the acquisition of consumer goods and possessions. To succeed in the transformation process, these individual behaviours have then to transform the prevailing cultural climate and inform the choices taken at the business and political levels. These appear as necessary conditions also to avoid natural and social disasters that are a real possibility in front of us.[27]

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[26] This consideration could take us on a very long discussion. Here I can only refer to an interesting reflection of some aspects of the question, contained in Duprè (2001).

[27] Many recent scientific analyses have been pointing that our societies are heading towards multi-faceted disaster. The Stern report (2007) authoritatively pinpointed the costs and risks associate with Global warming, Tainter and Diamond have discussed the very real possibilities of social, economic and political collapse and so has done the Global Scenarios Group of the Stockholm environment institute (based in Boston).

Against this background, we will now inquire the broad suggestions that a reflection on Dharma can provide in order to better orient human efforts towards happiness and well-being.

The basic idea is a very old one: ‘first things first’, but the question is to recognize what are the most important things, those we want and have to sustain in the face of hard choices. There is also a much needed attitude that we have to cultivate in order to be able to maintain our choices and try and keep our evolutionary levels: pay respect, attention and care for all forms of life and all of its aspects. Picturing these principles within the categories may help to see them in a more concrete way, as this immediately tells us not to do any harm to other human beings (to their bodies as well as to their minds and relationships) and living creatures or the environment. Moreover, the central attention of policies and economic policies should be families and then local communities, moving progressively towards considering larger human groupings. The larger aggregations should not benefit at the expenses of smaller ones. Austerity has to be a constant reference, in order to avoid unreasonable and distorting concessions. Each one has to do his part according to his/her capabilities and should be sustained—as much as possible—in the process of developing and using them for the benefit of himself, his family and community (in turn).

These general considerations imply that the central focus of policies should be to sustain families and local communities in order to help them to help themselves. Welfare policies (and not bribes or exchanges of favours) ought to be well-directed and be seen as investments and not just costs, as their aim should be to help, when circumstances demand and not always, their proper working in sustaining individuals in the pursuit of their life tasks in all the different phases of life.

A crucial form of investment is that in education, in order to have both more capable individuals and more sound relationships amongst individuals within the communities and across them.

Furthermore, the full development of personal capabilities requires each individual to invest in himself and choose his occupation according to abilities and inclinations. While only those who are prevented by limits of nature to properly sustain themselves deserve the full community help for their lives, the support to individuals to discover and develop their true capabilities is an investment that usually has high returns for everyone, as each person will, in turn, contribute to the well-being of the community. This aspect sheds some light on the interconnected nature of local communities, in which reciprocal can and help should be the rule.

The interpretation of labour is also quite different in this view with respect to the traditional microeconomic one, which associates with it a varying degree of disutility. Here labour is one of the areas of personal realization, both an ethical act and the result of some of the ‘functionings’ associated with the development of personal capabilities.[28]

[28] Although this approach might look like an ideal which is far from reality, on one hand it has a number of correspondences in western philosophical traditions (see Peretti 2011 for a survey heading in this direction) and on the other it has been very successfully applied to a modern enterprise by the famous Italian industrialist of the 1950s and 1960s Adriano Olivetti.

The attention and central role attributed in this view to local communities is again running against the traditional mainstream economics (become a popular) tenet that 'bigger is much better' and that globalization creates a lot of opportunities for everyone, opportunities that would not exist in a less open world. A proper discussion on these two related points would, again, require a book in itself. Here I will simply quote two well-known economists, Keynes and Daly, to qualify this tenet and argue against the commonly maintained one. Keynes wrote: '*I sympathize, therefore, with those who would minimize, rather than those who would maximize, economic entanglement between nations. Ideas, knowledge, art, hospitality, travel—these are things which should of their nature be international. But let goods be homespun whenever it is reasonable and conveniently possible; and above all, let finance be primarily national*[29]'.

The question of the dimensions has a lot to do with this opposite view and with the judgement on consumerism and values that are prior and need sustaining. The illusion that there are no physical limits to the growth of production[30] is one of the main tenets and myths of contemporary economics and politics and it is the only justification for the idea that bigger is cheaper and better. As it is well known, the physical and social limits to growth have instead been explored for a number of years (at least since the first Club of Rome report, in 1972, which produced exceptionally good predictions by all standards over a period of more than 40 years[31]), and in recent years the de-growth approach[32] is gaining wider and wider recognition. In light of these considerations, small is not stupid (as reads the title of the book of one ideologist of mainstream economics) but it looks again 'beautiful', in the sense of sustainable and viable, as Schumacher used to say.

The questions of the quantities of production and of local versus global dimensions have also a lot to do with that of true democracy. Subordination to the choices of transnational enterprises and their rent-seeking approach cannot be a guarantee of any real democracy, which can only rest on a sufficiently large diffusion of income and wealth.[33]

As a final point and argument, I want to recall again the teachings of contemplative sciences, in their interlinks with natural ones. Both approaches have been inquiring into the nature and origin of consciousness and of conscience and agree on the recognition that we experience the existence of both. Though a better understanding of their nature would be a relevant achievement, this is already enough, however, to ask the following question: if both approaches have recognized the existence of consciousness and conscience, why do other (pretended) scientific approaches (and in particular economics) continue to ignore the implications for themselves of this simple recognition?

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[29] Keynes, quoted in Daly (1992), Farwell lecture to the World Bank.

[30] An international conference will be held at the end of October (28–31), 2013 Torino, at the Faculty of Engineering, in which physicists will try and challenge mainstream economists to seriously take this aspect into consideration.

[31] See Meadows et al. (2004).

[32] See the various books by Latouche included in the references.

[33] See again Lasch (1994), and its many references.

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Chapter 5
Happiness Is an Art of Living: Towards a Contemplative Perspective on Economy as Relational Work

Vincenzo M. B. Giorgino

5.1 Introduction

The main aim of this chapter is to show how the traditions of wisdom—or *classic beliefs* (Veenhoven in this book)—have been recently translated in lay terms and widely applied in different settings to support and enhance well-being. Their secularization is a historical process taking place over the last 30 years that has definitively changed their status in our culture.

At first, I will deal with what can be considered the core part of this inherited wisdom culture, i.e. contemplative knowledge and practices, in order to clarify their basic characteristics and contribution to the definition of happiness in our economic and social context.

As far as they supersede the individualistic model of well-being and every utilitarian perspective, they lead to challenge the same definitions of self, choice and action in social sciences. In one sentence, they call for a renewed attention to what is human experience and to a refined, at the same time broader and more precise and effective understanding of it, including a detailed and constructive methodological critique of current 'subjective' observations of well-being.

In the same vein, the opportunities opened by this new perspective in social sciences about well-being and its study could be grasped only if the disentanglement from any individualistic model is accomplished.

Next, I introduce the *relational work* model offered by the economic sociologist Viviana Zelizer (2011) as an initial step oriented to a more realistic definition of economic activity. Nevertheless, Zelizer's pragmatic and interactional-based model is still limited by the cognitive dominance inherited by G. H. Mead and typical of the constructivist paradigm. I suggest a positive step forward through the re-evaluation of William James' contribution in the field of theory of action as reconstructed by the sociologist Jack Barbalet.

At this point, a possible convergence can be glimpsed between the two realms of knowledge: the quest of one meets the orientation of the other. Currently, personal evaluations via questionnaire-based surveys (i.e., third person inquiries)

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seem to be the best sources of collecting data on happiness (Veenhoven 2010, pp. 611–613). If contemplative knowledge clearly sustains a social science perspective that well-being is 'definable, observable, measurable and practicable' (Veenhoven 2010), nevertheless—being it embodied and not exclusively based on cognition—it leads to a critical appraisal of our current tool-box, suggesting that we must take into account first-person inquiry as well. It is not new that narrative methods can play a major role in this area, for example in understanding economic and social suffering, as outstanding contributions such as those of Bourdieu and collaborators (1993) show. Nevertheless, in my view, sociological claims interpreting these methods of observation as the closest to experience fail to reach the goal as I sustain in the third paragraph.

This essay is an effort toward a more consistent sociological contribution in this transdisciplinary discussion and to the construction of a well-grounded contemplative science.

5.2 Traditions of Wisdom and Contemplative Knowledge/Practices Today

It is undoubtful that since the 1960s existential unrest animated the young generation and involved them in what was called counterculture. It was testified by the attraction for the witness traditions of the past with a special place occupied by Eastern contemplative philosophies and practices (who—being now in her 50s or over—does not remember Maharishi as the guru of different rockstars such as the Beatles?).

But as Parsons (1974) notes in his last remarkable study the time was not ripe for all this, not at least for an epidemic spread. In the last two decades these condition changed with the convergence of different factors. One has been the westernization of these traditions, characterized by an unexpected secularization process, radically far away from the usual sociological interpretation to which we were accustomed: an effect of the rationalization imposed by modern capitalism, basically a picture of the decline of all traditional religions, with their symbolic spaces occupied until a recent past—following Robert Bellah (1970)—by a 'civil religion' in the USA. Contemplative knowledge and practices have taken a different way from what was expected if we get a look to what happened since Parsons's writings until now. The westernization of Buddhism and Hinduism through the diffusion of connected social practices more and more offered by lay trained practitioners, joined to a parallel and beneficial dialogue with science. In some ways, this westernization is often accompanied by commodification and its history is still unwritten: it will be not surprising that it had a knock on effect on the whole process of diffusion.

But what kind of well-being do people pursue with contemplative practices? I think it could be close to what professor Veenhoven (2010) defines

Table 5.1 Four qualities of life

	Other qualities	Inner qualities
Life chances	Livability of environment	Inner qualities
Life results	Utility of life	*Satisfaction*

Veenhoven (2010), p. 608

Table 5.2 Four kinds of satisfaction

	Passing	Enduring
Part of life	Pleasure	Pan-satisfaction
Life as a whole	Peak-experience	Life satisfaction

Veenhoven (2010) Table 5.2, p. 609

as 'satisfaction' in Table 5.1, complying with the generic idea of an inner quality—life ability of the person. While outer qualities are also important for human flourishing (the first quadrant of the horizontal line in Veenhoven 2010; Table 5.1), they do not depend directly on people but on institutions. People can directly develop their inner skills to deal with external conditions, whichever they were.

Contemplative knowledge and practices are anchored to experience. The basis of our humanness in contemplative knowledge is characterized by the ability to pay attention to the moment. In fact, the main characteristics of contemplative practices are their grounding on *not doing, i.e.* just being present.

At this point, it is undoubtable that this experience is quite far from Veenhoven's description of satisfaction: 'We have an idea of how we have felt over the last year … Humans can also judge life cognitively by comparing life-as-it-is with notions of life how-it-should-be' (Veenhoven 2010, p. 610). Following Veenhoven (2009), cognitive theory holds that 'happiness is a product of human thinking and reflects discrepancies between perceptions of life-as-it-is and notions of how-life-should-be' and so far, it sustains that happiness as such does not depend on objective conditions of life. In other words we are unhappy as far as standards—rooted in collective beliefs and changing overtime and from one society to another—clash with the current state of affairs. Happiness is a matter of judgement of the gap between reality and expectations. This means to reduce our happiness to a cognitive appraisal based on individual preferences.

The above misunderstandings influence the rest of the scheme as in the distinction between passing and enduring satisfactions (Veenhoven 2010, p. 609, Table 5.2).

The former category includes 'Enlightenment', classified as a peak experience (Veenhoven 2009). De facto, in our times it does not attract research attention as it

did in the 60s[1]: the current interest is to everyday life and to step by step changes in the development of attentional skills and acceptance.[2] Happiness, as I noted above, can be intended as an enduring condition of joy about one's own life (Veenhoven 1997) and not simply as a state of excitement, or a form of peak experience. At least we must define happiness as it emerges from the contemplative culture, which can be what Veenhoven identifies as a 'stable appreciation of life as a whole' (Veenhoven 1997, pp. 4, 22). In a sense it is more a life skill or a mode of being (Ricard 2008) that it is possible to learn than a state of bliss or a peak experience as is still intended following one of the first inquiries about it in the 70s (Maslow 1962). From a contemplative perspective one could agree on the definition of satisfaction as the 'overall appreciation of one's life as-a-whole' if providing to avoid a self-centering interpretation and not intending it as a balance between the bads and the goods from one personal point of view, but as a form of acceptance without a judgemental attitude of what life offers.[3] In this learning process in which attention and acceptance are developed, peak experiences could be part of enlightenment or samadhi (in Pali and Sanskrit), satori (in Chinese and Japanese), but are not passing—as Veenhoven qualified them; if it is correct to say that they are not long-lasting, nevertheless they are not the result of a search for momentary pleasure as they are part of a long term process as opposed to the 'overall appreciation of one's life as-a-whole'. Both are part of the same process of learning how to be happy. So far, enlightenment should be seen as a synonym of life satisfaction (Fig. 2): 'enduring satisfaction with one's-life-as-a-whole' in Veenhoven's terms.

In the contemplative perspective well-being is neither oriented to hedonism, i.e. the search for momentary pleasure in itself, nor a form of contentment (Veenhoven's 'perceived realization of wants' Fig. 3 in Veenhoven 2009).

For Zhang and Veenhoven (2008), some Buddhist schools—they do not specify which ones—can be considered variants of the cognitive theory of happiness: in other words the pursuit for happiness is of little value, as it can be achieved lowering our standards and also because all standards are illusory. But the contemplative concept of the illusionary nature of desire does not support the idea of a man deprived of any expectations towards life, on the contrary it suggests to recognize the relativity of it and the need of equanimity, i.e. a balance to avoid attachment or, in other words, the identification with our inner states. This is what can be called 'appreciation of life', exactly the term also used by Veenhoven (2000).

An appraisal based only on books cannot be sufficient to understand how wisdom cultures influence our life and our pursuit of happiness. The traditions of wisdom cannot be directly taken from the history of ideas or religions (Zhang and Veenhoven 2008) and their principles compare thereafter with those dominating in

[1] See Maslow (1962) for a well-known example, and also Fromm et al. (1960).

[2] It is of significant value what was said—with a hint of self-irony—by one well known and appreciated Zen teacher, Charlotte Joko Beck: 'In more than 40 years of practice I have never met an enlightened person'.

[3] What is identified as *equanimity* in the Buddhist tradition of Vipassana: Fronsdal (2004).

our societies as such. Moreover, the passage from these philosophical statements about well-being in forms of their empirical assessment through third person inquiry is critical as it has completely lost the experiential dimension of those practices, the observation of their outcome and measurement. From my point of view we need to integrate this picture taking into account first-person inquiry. The picture is also incomplete as the above definition of happiness is only built on one side of the coin, i.e. all those functions related to life, with the exclusion of every reference to non-life (which must not be identified with the opposite to life, or death). In other words, the full scheme fails to include its opposite, while in a contemplative perspective we need to understand happiness within the broader picture. The current societal conditions can fully display elements of human culture left aside in the last Centuries under the ambiguous term of 'traditional beliefs' as in the charicatural opposition between religious beliefs and the emerging Enlightenment beliefs in Middle Age (Veenhoven 2010, p. 605).

In contemplative practices the learning process to which the practitioner is socialized helps her to code what's going on at emotional level without acting. This will enable her to recognize patterns of attachment to which she was socialized in her life and step by step be able to avoid being dragged along. This is also true for thoughts and the sensorial dimension. In two words, the process of awareness is based on *attention* and *acceptance* of life-as-it-is, which includes "non life" alongside the principle of co-dependent arising on which the neuro-biologist Francisco Varela et al. wrote extensively (Varela and Shear 1999a, b), overcoming the pre-classification and evaluation of life with our likes and dislikes, in which must be included the process of comparison with others' conditions.

5.2.1 On Methods and Methodologies

While agreeing with the final remarks of Zhang and Veenhoven's paper (2008) '…recommendations meant to guide real life should be put to reality tests when possible, so that a body of evidence-based advice can develop. This kind of research will probably detract from the myth of timeless wisdom in such philosophies…' nevertheless it is surprising that they do not make any reference to the growing literature on meditation and well-being developed since the 1970s. If this is a praiseworthy scope, we should adopt the right tools for it.

So far, if 'subjective' well-being can be understood, observed and measured, as the process involved cannot be detected only by third person inquiry, there is a need for more subtle instruments of observation than quantitative studies based on questionnaires. For example now it is possible to rely on measures of serotonin levels, blood flow, oxygen uptake, electrical activity of different parts of the brain and MRI scans (Ash 2007).[4]

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[4] As the economist Ash underlines, adaption and social comparison seem to be the cultural models able to explain those results (Ash 2007, p. 5).

Happiness is linked to a process of lifelong learning as described with reference to two traditions in Kolm (Buddhism) and Burlando (Hinduism), both in this book. In the last three decades we witnessed the encounter between contemplative practices and science, with both taking advantage of this. More specifically, on one hand the gain is the opening of the definition of consciousness, self and experience and, on the other, scientific observation and measurements gain beginning to look carefully at the contemplative process itself.

5.2.2 *The Affective Base of Choice and the Function of Attention*

It is worthy to note that the rich literature on contemplative practices and well-being—from the first Transcendental Meditation (TM) approach to the recent mindfulness area of research—is not taken into account in the happiness studies.[5]

So far, these practices are part of a model in which conditions are not considered as separate entities. They are only conventional elements that cannot be taken for granted. In this sense there is room for personal improvement and development at any level and the consequent interactional chains will do their part too, the unexpected effects of good karmas. Obviously, it seems better to be healthy and rich than sick and poor, but there is room for improvement in both conditions, as they are considered as illusory and impermanent. Attachements to the conditions at hand is the real object of attention for which these practices are for, their *raison d'etre*. The varieties of conditions—central in social sciences—loose their central importance once we focus on the existential dimension along the life-and-death continuum. So, the efforts to specify the variety of conditions and their effects must be integrated with the existential unity of all life manifestations, human, animal and with non-life as well: all is interaction.

Moreover, the idea that systems of thought born in agrarian societies cannot fulfill contemporary needs is apparently rational but reveals underneath a prejudice against the 'tradition'. In sociology, tradition is linked to a pre-industrial, steady system of social relationships, unable to grasp the modern by definition. And this lead us to the process of secularization of Eastern religious practices as happened in the West at least since the 1960s. The concrete, everyday life form assumed by this process recently contrasts with what is expected by sociologists and this is the main point of my subsequent discussion.

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[5] See Ospina et al. (2007) for a recent comprehensive evaluation study about this literature; see also the documentation cited in the introduction of this book.

By the way, if happiness has only recently become a systematic area of research, the same is true for suffering. Morgan and Wilkinson argue that social sciences have fundamentally failed to explore the existential meaning of suffering (2001). In 1993 Pierre Bourdieu gave a fundamental contribution to it with the project *The Weight of the World* paying attention to human suffering in our society to develop a comprehensive perspective which seems to be the only tool we have to understand our possible biases.

Looking at a societal level we can easily think that the interest of sociology is to show a link between subjective states and the economy with the aim of clarifying their relationships—economic and social unequalities (i.e. the actors' relationship with money and the market) are of fundamental importance to define the situation and the opportunities to change in order to achieve a better state of affairs, i.e. more happiness or a better level of well-being. If we would be asked about suffering we would not be short of issues. Suffering is easy to find.

As the anthropologist Veena Das writes 'While in our practical life we continually depend upon comparing negative and positive values, we cannot often weigh how much suffering and how much happiness is worth. For this we need, as the philosopher Schopenahuer put it, the experience of life' (Das 1997, p. 563) and she adds that social institutions produce suffering on the one hand and create moral communities that could address it on the other. Das underlines the role of traditional culture in healing, so that as 'suffering is socially produced, it is in collective life that individuals seek to understand their experience and to work towards healing… The role of oracles, medicine men, shamans and doctors in providing succour for the victims of war, insurgency, floods, famines and plagues is a stunning testimony to the way in which suffering arising from ordinary everyday events is addressed, and also how resources for regeneration may be found in the different spiritual traditions of local communities'. And she goes on writing 'the extraordinary ability of societies to generate spiritual resources to transcend the muteness of those who do not know how to overcome the terrible suffocation of their pain' (Das 1997, p. 571).

One may think that this could be true for those in the lower echelon of the social pyramid, but it is also true for well educated, middle class and even combative feminists of our societies: the Junghian psychoanalist, poet and cantadora Clarissa Pinkola Estes' book *Women who run with the wolves* (1991) was on the New York Times Best Seller List for 145 weeks with over a million copies sold, a book based on a rediscovery of women's wisdom for post-modern readers. In general terms, 'by providing a social testimony for individual grief … these healers also create a new way for the suffering person to inhabit the past in a different mode. The renarrativizing of the most grievous events sometimes allows people to move out of frozen positions…' (Das 1997), like in the case of the Holocaust.

First, our evolutionary pathway implies a certain degree of dis-attention to societal meanings, a taken for granted world is a pre-condition for social order and individuals sanity. As Berger writes:

'It is sociologically, anthropologically and perhaps even biologically *necessary* that a good portion of social life takes place in a state of dim awareness or semisleep… We shall take more seriously "meaningless rituals', 'empty forms' or 'mere routines' in social life—simply through recognizing that were social life in its entirety to be charged with profound meaning, we would go out of minds' (Berger 1971, p. 4). Precisely for this, contemplative knowledge in an age of individualization (Beck 2000) sustains the opposite, i.e. that we can develop our attentional skills to deal with multiple sensorial stimuli and goods offering, to establish an inner order in dynamic harmony with the external life processes.

A second element is linked to the definition of the self.[6] Being the self, in the contemplative culture, a liable social construction, not stable and long lasting, habits are grounded in past socialization,[7] as patterns consolidated through attachments and self protection.

Moreover, as our evolutionary pathway does not require adaptation and social comparison as in the past, dominant cultural model does not fit the current requirements for evolvability. Following the economist Colin Ash (2007), it is not adequate as it could be considered as representative of the last stage of human evolution, approximately began with the Enlightenment era and which especially bloomed after the Industrial Revolution. In this sense, the dominant utilitarian belief is a prominent part of a narrative which we inherited and are still following; it could not be exaggerated to look at it as a modern form of *traditional* knowledge, i.e. a system of beliefs resisting any empirical evidence and surviving through the force of a powerful institutional support and shared prejudices, but unfit for the times we are living.

So far, the ideal types set up by Veenhoven on the basis of survey research must not be taken at face value, rather interpreted as models still working, but unfit. This maybe because social order has its locus in the individual which is agent and agency and the division between the two lies in action: hierarchy loses its centrality, authority and power become more local, both subjected to a continuous call for legitimation. It is if happiness, as a sociological phenomenon, is lacking of any basis, like a *contentless* happiness.

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[6] Beyond the already cited works of Geertz and Spiro in the introduction of this book, I wish to cite more specifically, Thomas Csordas, who makes a step forward in his enlightening contribution on embodiment and attention, much closer to the discussion we are developing here (1993).

[7] It sounds similar to what is sustained in social sciences. In order to avoid any misunderstanding, I must say that it is true that in social science the self is relative and depending on the environment, but this is usually sustained along a 'pathological' line of inquiry—a sociology of the lack of something'—in which a *real* self exists and it is manipulated, offended, often suppressed and commodified by the capitalist system… let aside the contradiction between the idea of the inexistence of a single individual—always intended as 'isolated'—and this conception of the *pure* self.

5.3 Economy as Relational Work

The utilitarian model on which happiness studies and economics are based has been challenged in Economic Sociology since its birth with various outcomes. Viviana Zelizer reviews the main themes of the so called *New Economic Sociology* summarizing these studies in three categories: extension, context-based and alternative[8] (Zelizer 2002).

(1) The *extension* of economic models to issues marginal for the economists.
It consists of applying relatively standard economic models to phenomena that economists have not treated extensively or effectively, such as household behaviour or religious recruitment (Zelizer 2002, p. 102).

(2) The provision of *context* for individual decision within constraint. Context focuses on features of social organization that work as facilitators or constraints on economic action. All the studies related to the key work *embeddedness* pertain to this sub-group.
In both cases, which have predominated in the agenda of *the New Economic Sociology,* cultural complexity is left out of the picture.

(3) The search for *alternative descriptions* and explanations of economic phenomena, thus challenging the focus on individual decisions within constraints. This approach appears of great help in order to dis-identify the market from the utilitarian belief, an intellectual and moral urgency in a world in which its supporters and enemies take this overlapping for granted. This has an important consequence as it allows to find a way out from what Viviana Zelizer calls *Theories of Hostile Worlds*, i.e. the perspective that is based on the separation of money and the self, the latter intended as a sort of ‘pure spirit’, an untouchable core component of humans which seems to dominate social sciences, permeating both orthodox and critical models of the economy.[9]

Instead of paying attention to economic exchanges other than those based on the market and money, Zelizer concentrated herself on them with what I think are very interesting results (as in her studies of life insurance for children in the USA in the XIX Century or on the different meanings attributed to money in the household etc..). Thinking that money is day by day a more abstract measure of

[8] ‘in their attempt to match economists’ parsimonious explanations, [sociologists] treat culture as preferences, which remain exogenous to economic activity as such… … [or] … incorporate [it] as another instrument or constraint in economic processes… the alternative model thus shifts from context to content. For example instead of treating ‘the market’ as an autonomous realm, alternative analysts of markets chart their variability and identify the shared understandings that occur within and behind every market, shared understandings that underlie the very possibility of market activity’ (Zelizer 2002, p. 108).

[9] In times in which the destructive power of the economic forces seems to prevail, the intellectual reaction to fight it back, gets room for these kinds of conceptions, oriented to preserve the ‘pure self’. In sociology of work, this approach could be originally found in Arlie Russell Hochshild’s contribution on emotional work (Hochshild 2003).

exchange value[10] it's an illusion due more to the rationalization belief than to the technological advance. Even without a face to face transaction, every technological device has embedded in it some human ideas about the economic game. Zelizer identifies four elements in any economic activity:

1- distinctive social ties.
2- a set of economic transactions.
3- media for those transactions.
4- negotiated meanings, i.e. 'participants' understanding concerning the meanings of relations, transactions, and media including their moral valuation, combined with constant negotiation, modification and contestation of those meanings' (Zelizer 2011, p. 8).

From my point of view, the last element implies an individual work about meaning and this work is not only cognitive based. It is also the basic starting point of making sense of the other three elements and a very helpful perspective with empirical foundations that free us from the identification of the model of homo economicus with the functioning of the market and money. People manage their situations and negotiate meanings. How are meanings built, shared, negotiated? How do individuals build meanings? To find an answer, I am urged to deal with two main critical points of Zelizer's model:

(A) the shift to the interpersonal level
(B) the identification of culture (and meanings) with symbols (mental accounting)

(A) the shift to the interpersonal level

For Zelizer the solution lies on looking at an interpersonal, not individual, level. The social level is at the core of any social process, including the economic one… …relational work… posits that in all areas of economic life people are creating, maintaining, symbolizing, and transforming meaningful social relations. As they do so, moreover, they are carrying on cultural symbolic work. The goal, therefore, is to study variability and change in those social relations' (Zelizer 2011, p. 5).

In this first step she implicitly identifies the 'individual 'level with an atomistic model of the single person. Why not rely upon a social psychology that fits with our sociological scopes?

So far, *relational work* relies upon a model in which the only possible individual activity is towards the others, i.e. it could not be in relation with himself (the subject is a black box frantically acting only outside himself). The reductionist view of constructivism, based on the symbolic interactionist tradition—set up by the definition of the self by G. H. Mead—is here fully operational. In my view, considering the individual does not imply a reduction, rather an integration.

(B) Feelings do not pop up in a void: they are social elements but not fully—and only—built in a shared culture. In human experience there exists a *space* in which

[10] As it moved from coins to paper money to cheques and payment over the internet, to ATM payments to credit cards and mobile telephones as banking points.

everything can happen: supporting existent transaction and relationships, innovating them etc…

Action needs individuals who are never isolated atoms. Individuals act within a social framework in which they *feel*—before any cognitive understanding—the situation. Their understanding is embodied and their bodies are social as well, but not fully. Here, I firstly rely on Barbalet's work about the reconsideration of James' legacy about emotions.[11] We first need to recognize that individual knowledge has its own place, so that social science can approach it with first and second person methods, once the concept of experience is correctly defined.[12] Experience means a unique, socially specific presence in life, which is knowledgeable with at least two distinct tools: individual and scientific.

In contemplative culture, at the roots of human experience are those questions about the meaning of life that generate what can be called *existential work*; through a specific training, it becomes *contemplative work*, that leaves us a chance to change the complex interplay of elements at work in any situation. It should be taken into account that these elements are not cognitive at first, but emotional and sensorial. So we can consider the degree of personal awareness as a crucial variable. Probably, the more aware the subject is to the present situation, the less history finds room in his/her decision. What should be worthy of note is that any individual is more than the social positions he occupies and the roles he/she performs. Within her, there is room for different potential selves, as short and long-run selves. Specific degrees of awareness are spent in social interactions with different outcomes: it is expected that the more people are aware or wakeful, the more they are able to cope with adverse conditions, which means *responding* instead of *re-acting*, taking into account what wise life masters call *life as it is*. In the best cases, people achieve a well-balanced view that enables them to supersede personal hierarchy of preferences, achieving an indifference to ego-centred goals and enabling them to concentrate on the wider consequences of any lines of action and choose what is the best for life.[13] So far, the space between any individual and social situations is better understood if we take into account the contemplative contribution to the process. People can suspend action and, through a cultural training in contemplative practices, can achieve a better understanding of their interaction, even changing the (patterned) meanings usually attached to them.

Contemplative knowledge has the pretence to supply a fresh experience of the situation, which means that in every interaction anyone has the opportunity to change and challenge whatever meaning available. Creativity easily sneaks in not

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[11] Many misunderstandings occurred about his thought, with the excessive attention to the Meadian definition of the self.

[12] In my opinion, the most interesting attempt to open the scientific model to the fullness of human experience is due to Varela et al. 1991 (see Chap. 2: 'What do we mean 'Human Experience'?').

[13] Where life is intended as: the interactants and the indefinite circles of relationships around them, from the closest to the farthest ones, following the principle that a butterfly flitting in the Asian continent has an effect on an elephant in the African savanna.

for aesthetic or political reasons, not to support morality but to support life. It is a form of creativity that has a broader scope than the individual one's.

So, the contemplative model is oriented to a practical model grounded in experience. Experiencing is not what we express and narrate to others (the *lived* experience): it is a full body-mind living act of being in the present moment (the *living* experience). This lets us to understand the difference between a wakeful sentient being and a reaction-oriented one. The metaphor most widely used is that of a dream: in daily life we live like in a dream, as we follow our cultural idols, internal and external. *Being wakeful* means living a life in which we are fully present, able to discern between our preferences and the neutral state of affairs. We can also develop compassion and take action with attention to the consequences of our decision, the consequences we can see at the moment on the basis of our knowledge. This is usually intended as acting in favour of life, not only for our self-interest.

5.3.1 Sharing Meanings

What we decide is clearly a respons-able act but the process through which we reach such a point is not a volitional one. It happens through a social process of suspended action, whose practice-based model helps us in developing a broader attention to the present, observing also our main emotional, sensorial and thought process from outside.

Both determinism and free will do not fit into the scheme as the model is not founded on either of the two poles. Social practices derived from the wisdom traditions favour people's self-transformation, a program in which individuals challenge their own culture and their personal habits through a non-strictly cognitive and will-oriented process. It is an attention-acceptance-wakeful action (compassionate).

In this perspective, *Enlightenment* is a process of progressive clarification not to achieve our 'true self'—which does not exist anywhere—but to feel more clearly our personal construction of preferences. For these reasons, the study of what happened to the Eastern wisdom practices once they arrived in the West after the 1960s is an intriguing issue. As they are now living a process of institutionalization, both in the academic context and professions, it is of specific interest to study their transformation, once they have lost the dominant religious monopoly of the East. In this transition they could have also soften their internal hierarchical (and male dominant) authority, giving room to a new lay model.

5.4 Towards the *Homo Sentiens* Model: Greater Wisdom for a Greater Number

In William James choice becomes social action through emotion 'the line where past and future meet…' (Barbalet 1997, p. 105). The 'random images, fancies, accidental out-birth of spontaneous variation in the functional activity of the excessively unstable human brain' are the source of new conceptions, emotions, and active tendencies'. They produce what is new or underived, as this scholar comments.

His somatic theory of emotions is of great help not only to integrate the relational work model but also to set up the basis for the comprehension of what happens when we feel, think and eventually act (the choice process), so to open a dialogue with the contemplative model of the mind.

This is of great importance in a discipline in which 'sociological theories of action predominantly focus on cognition or norms, rather than emotion. Sociological theories of emotions generally operate through a constructionist perspective which is concerned with the formation of emotions (largely through cognitive and cultural processes) rather than with its role in directing social action, and the orientation of action to the future' (Barbalet 1997, p. 111).

Why do we need to overcome symbolic interactionism and its meaning-centred focus?

Symbolic interactionism functions through what was called 'self-indication' by Herbert Blumer: '…the acting unit is the self… the self acts 'in and with regard to a situation' (cited by Barbalet 1997). Blumer added that action is 'formed and or constructed by interpreting the situation' and it consists of three steps: the acting self must 'identify the things' the action is to deal with (such as tasks, opportunities, obstructions, distractions and resources), it must assess them in some fashion, and it must make decisions on the basis of the assesment. Such interpretations are typically established through joint and reciprocal processes…' In Blumer, Barbalet concludes, it is likely that the tension within the 'self indication' and the existence of a common stock of interpretations resulting from previous interaction will be resolved in favour of collective definitions of the situation against pure self-constructed interpretations' (Barbalet 1997, p. 112) The creative aspects of the self are lost. In fact, in relational work the exclusion of inner interaction (i.e. at individual level) makes him begin from the dyadic level.

Again James on the somatic theory of emotions writes 'My theory … is that the bodily changes following directly the perception of an exciting fact, and that our feeling of the same changes as they occur IS the emotion'. And also: 'so indefinitely numerous and subtle' are the bodily states and changes associated with emotion, 'that the entire organism may be called a sounding board' (cited by Barbalet 1999, pp. 252–253).

This is in contrast with the constructivist approach that states the emotional self can be interpreted in terms of cultural rules and norms, as in Arlie Russell Hochshild. For James our consciousness is made by the empirical self or Me and the I, the pure ego (Barbalet 1999, p. 259). The Me has three components: the material Me, (the body, clothes and its extensions: family, property), the social Me (the recognition received from others), the spiritual Me ('the faculty and dispositions of the self taken concretely as an object of self-reflection', the concrete manifestations of a person's subjective faculties and disposition, including how a person regards herself, her moral in sensibility, conscience and will. The latter 'being the domain of value and self-appraisal, is more self monitoring than the material and social selves and therefore can be seen as the source of preference reflexivity'. This tripartite model indicates the complex structure of the self, so far its reduction to one kind of utility is misleading: following Barbalet, it's much a matter for 'selfs-interest rather than self-interests': apparently inconsistent preferences are coherent with different kinds of needs (Barbalet 2008, pp. 8–10). William James helps us

to mend the fabric of separation between the rational and the emotional, being the latter part of a division of labor in which it strategically solves 'the problems of purpose and selection, of salience, required for rational thought and action' (Antonio Damasio cited by Barbalet 1999, p. 263). In other words, James represents an alternative to constructivist focus on the cognitive dimension, and of special interest for economic theory what he writes about habit: a learned behaviour, an economizer of 'the expense of nervous and muscular energy', a simplifier that can diminish 'the conscious attention' with which our acts are performed and therefore occurs "without any reference to the conscious will'… once proficiency is attained… then even for the most complicated sequence 'mere sensation is sufficient guide, and the upper regions of the brain are set comparatively free' (James cited by Barbalet 2008, p. 2).

Barbalet remarks here the 'discerning appreciation of the limited role of reason in choice-taking and decision-making in action'. James elaborates a theory of economic action that is intrinsically non-utilitarian about self-interest (Barbalet 2008, p. 5). 'Only those items which I notice shape my mind… and what is noticed is not accidental or random for without selective interest, experience is an utter chaos' (James cited by Barbalet). And the ultimate source of it is 'the passional nature of the human organism, emotion is the source of originality in thought and action.

Goals or purposes of the action are therefore necessarily consequences rather than antecedents of an action, exactly the opposite of the utilitarian assumptions. In these terms, the social construction of rationality is based on a feeling, a feeling of expectancy towards the constant feature of any social and economic experience: uncertainty. Uncertainty is a pervasive property of every action: whenever an action changes the circumstances in which it occurs, uncertainty is there, unavoidably. Barbalet cites here Keyness and his discussion about the theoretical neglect of confidence on the *General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*: 'A large proportion of our positive activities depend on spontaneous optimism rather than on a mathematical expectation… most of our decisions to do something positive… can only be taken as a result of animal spirits—of a spontaneous urge to action rather than inaction, and not as an outcome of a weighted average of quantitative benefits multiplied by quantitative probabilities'… When 'uncertainty is more difficult to manage, as in volatile stock markets, then choices are made more directly through emotional engagement…' (Barbalet 2008, p. 7).[14]

In economic theory, Nelson and Winter in their 1982 *An evolutionary Theory of Economic Change*—cited again by Barbalet—follow a similar pathway linking routinary behaviour and innovation: 'They make the point that in skilled actions a large range of alternative behaviours are continually being rejected in favour of the behaviour sequence called for in the program and therefore that the choice among behaviour options that take place in the exercise of a skill typically involves

[14] Amartya Sen, introducing *commitment*, favours an approach to preference ranking that allows ranking of preference, ranking or meta-ranking of action-sets that goes well beyond behavioural evidence for preferences and gives a role to introspection and to communication (Sen 1977 cited in Barbalet 2008, p. 11).

no deliberation and it is a constituent of the capability that the skill represents' (Barbalet 2008, p. 3). A deliberate choice is necessary when the actor must learn, not later; there is also room for it when institutions may cease their effectiveness because of changes that have occurred in the context. New learning sequences are required: for both authors it is a matter of innovation and attention (Barbalet 2008, p. 4). Attention has a pivotal role in guiding the direction of selection and content of innovation and Barbalet notes that—at this point—a theory of attention is clearly lacking. It could be useful to recall what James wrote about:

> "The faculty of voluntarily bringing back a wandering attention, over and over again, is the very root of judgment, character, and will… An education which should improve this faculty would be the education par excellence." (James 1890/1923, p. 424, italics in original) (cited in Shapiro et al. 2008).

And, from my point of view it is exactly what is available through the contemplative knowledge about the functioning of our body-mind: the neurobiologist Francisco Varela with philosopher Jonathan Shear began from here when they set up the neurophenomenological approach at the end of the 1990s (1999 b).

The importance of self reflection leads us to methods that can better help the understanding of humans. Once we get closer to human suffering, it's all about our understanding. From Pierre Bourdieu to Richard Sennett, from Norman Denzin (1985) to Catherine Ellis (1991), narrative seems to represent the most adequate tool to deal with this issue, to let subjects express themselves in the best possible conditions and to interpret collected data. But the process of experience—as defined above—calls for more subtle tools as in first person inquiry and recent experiments in neurosciences show how we are equipped for more than that. So, I will refer below to a study by Richard Sennett about character in our flexible economy.

5.4.1 It's Not All About 'Character': Opening the Black Box

I have chosen a study based on narrative methods as the interpretative sociology claims—when faced by quantitative studies—of being more open to subjectivity and more focused on meanings. In one of his recent contributions Richard Sennett (2011) asks 'Can the events and accidents of life add up to a coherent story?' adding that '…since these events and accidents are beyond an uprooted person's control, the unity of a life-story has to reside in the person telling it… The narrator …must learn how to tell about disorder and displacement in his or her own life in such a way that he or she does not become confused or deranged by the telling' (Sennett 2011, p. 22).

Sennett refers to the new time orientation in economic activity as a clear index of our times: 'the profit horizon used for evaluating corporation was three years; in 1999 it was typically 3 months' (2011, p. 23). To hold 'fragmentary experiences together in time requires the capacity to step back from the power of each event to hurt or to disorient… the capacity to stand in and out of a situation at the same time is a practical strategy for survival… Workers who can manage this duality are better

able to fashion a sustaining long-term narrative for their lives'. And they do it in the only possible way avalaible: 'renouncing to the dénouement in one'e life history'. '…humanism refers in part to the self's determination to make continuities of these ill-fitting pieces of experience, through standing both within and outside them. The social challenge people face in doing so comes from those work places, political regimes, religions and ethnic cultures, that demand absolute immersion and total engagement. … these demands are becoming ever stronger in modern societies; surrrender of self to circumstance is a cultural fact as well as an economic fact. To resist surrendering, we need an idea of ourselves as both engaged and detached at any one moment' (Sennett 2011, p. 24). This means to live fully one's own life standing apart emotionally and intellectually from the variable flux of Fortuna, following the striking Sennett's citation of Pico della Mirandola. But Sennett, in his search for a solution, in my opinion shifts too early to cooperation, showing a diffuse conception of individual as an isolated actor if not identified within a group.

Then he refers to the short term orientation to which people are obliged to cope with in our times by economic forces. The author curiously choses the outdated term 'character',[15] linking individual behaviour with the meanings attached to it in a specific context, so the collected narratives tell two different context-based stories. Rico, a self-employed consultant in his fifties is in the 5 % top on the U.S. wage scale, a son of an Italian immigrant, who spent all his life as a janitor. The experience of time is the main divide between the two generations. In the previous context, the U.S. after the II World War, long-term commitments are the standard way to relate oneself in her job. For the next generation, in late modern capitalism, these ties are dysfunctional for a good job but as Sennett writes 'the qualities of a good work are not the qualities of good character' as it 'corrodes trust, loyalty, and mutual commitment'. A flexible job market pushed Rico 'to assert the sheer strength of will as the essence of his own ethical character' even facing events that are not under his responsibility, for which he is not accountable. In his resistance to the corrosion of long term qualities such as loyalty, commitment, purpose and resolution he finds himself trapped in a static condition of mere assertion of values. Sennett concludes that the narrative followed by his father, linear and cumulative, is dysfunctional but a new one is not at hand yet. The need for new narratives

[15] Following the author, character corresponds to 'the ethical value we place on our own desires and our relations to others… In this sense … [it] is a more encompassing term than its more modern offspring 'personality', which concerns desires and sentiments which may fester within, witnessed by no one else. 'Character' particularly focuses upon the long-term aspect of our emotional experience. Character is expressed by loyalty and mutual commitment, or through the pursuit of long-term goals, or by the practice of delayed gratification for the sake of a future end. Out of the confusion of sentiments in which we all dwell at any particular time, we seek to save and sustain some; these sustainable sentiments will serve our characters. Character concerns the personal traits which we value in ourselves and for which we seek to be valued by others. How do we decide what is of lasting value in ourselves in a society which is impatient, which focuses on the immediate moment? How can long-term goals be pursued in an economy devoted to the short term? How can long-term goals and commitments be sustained in institutions which are constantly breaking apart or continually being redesigned?' (Sennett 1998, p. 26).

resides in their function: 'more than simple chronicles of events; they give shape to the forward movement of time, suggesting reasons why things happen, showing their consequences' (Sennett 1998, p. 30). His condition is not idiosyncratic: 'the conditions of time in the new capitalism have created a conflict between character and experience, the experience of disjointed time threatening the ability of people to form their characters into sustained narratives' (Sennett 1998, p. 31). In this short term orientation, 'in place of driven man there appears the ironic man' and following Rorty, irony '…is a state of mind in which people are never quite able to take themselves seriously because always aware that the terms in which they describe themselves are subject to change, always aware of the contingency and fragility of their final vocabularies, and thus of their selves' (cited by Sennett 1998, p. 116) and concludes 'I cannot imagine a culture which socialized its youth in such a way as to make them continually dubious about their own process of socialization'. 'How to create a new life narrative in the condition of the new capitalism?' Sennett asks. Once the definition of the self cannot anymore be grounded on the occupational status (Sennett 1998, p. 120) on which kind of identity can it rely?

5.4.2 Contemplative Work: The Art of Dealing with Suffering

There is no easy answer to the question we asked above. I wish to suggest that suffering nowadays is linked to the self in different and unexpected ways.[16]

[16] I was struck by a recent list of suicides for economic reasons presented in the Italian newspapers: from small business-owners to employees and the unemployed. The variable of social position and the circumstances of the event were the clouds beyond which some common existential traits could have emerge. A more incumbent example came from a desperate episode that happened in Sicily in the past Summer (2013): a suicide committed by a skilled construction worker. This man hung himself and left a message in which he refers to the Italian Constitution article 1 that states '…the Republic is based on labor' and, as the State did not provide for the respect of this right, he decided 'to write himself off from the unemployment list'. The man in question was a trade union leader at a provincial level; not a 'weak character', being himself a member of the 'red' union (CGIL) in a Region well known for the weight of organized crime in the economy, especially in the construction sector. One of the two: (a) the system is so strong that it is able to destroy even individuals well forged to face harsh life conditions. (b): the worker's strength is actually based on weak ties, as it is based on an identity all shaped by labor and its values. Apart from extreme contexts for which (a) is the most probable answer, I wish to make a comment on the option (b). Workers living in the same conditions can be more detached from extreme acts like this because, paradoxically, they are not so linked to their social position and values. Due to his trade-union responsibilities, he was probably not isolated, rather surrounded by friends and workers sharing the same job culture, so reinforcing a model unfit to deal with the circumstances. I don't wish to be misunderstood, it is not a sort of blaming the victim's interpretation. I am trying to look at the interplay between the social conditions and their resonance at an inner level, a suffering that is not outwardly triggered. Events are always filtered by our interpretations and an effective strategy of social protection to save new potential victims cannot concentrate only on the outward, unfair context of economic conditions avoiding to consider the cultural dimension. This called intuitively for an integration of the usual explanation based on external variables affecting individual life.

Contemplative knowledge seems to suggest that it's the existence itself which is the source of affirmation of the continuity and purpose of each single individual. In a study published in 2007, Farb et al. used functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) to monitor our brain during different performative behaviours, in line with William James distinction between the I and Me. We know that the permanence of the self is a social construction: it relies on the accumulation of narratives we make time after time giving cohesion and stability to an otherwise shifting, fluid phenomenon. In James terms, this is granted by a 'me' that gives sense to the temporary 'I'. From the James metaphor since more than a decade ago we made significant progress with the identification of the neural basis of this process. The medial prefrontal cortices (mPFC) support this 'continuity-identity work' and its self-related skills, such as memory of self-traits, traits of similar others, reflected self-knowledge and aspirations for the future (Farb et al. 2007). The hypothesis explored by Farb et al. states that the dual nature of the self, its 'me' and 'I' properties has a dual correspondence in the body, i.e. in the brain, in particular the exteroceptive somatic and interoceptive insular cortices as neural markers of that momentary awareness. Existing neural evidence, suggests that Narrative Focus is oppositional to Experiential Focus: neural activation of the former modality obscures the latter. Two groups were selected: one of trained meditators and one without this expertise, aiming to determine whether the mindfulness trained group would reveal the neural networks supporting presence-centred self-awareness (Farb et al. 2007, p. 314). 'Eight sets of six personality-trait adjectives were constructed from a well-established list of personality-trait words… Each of the eight lists contained three mildly positive traits and three negative traits… as these traits would lend themselves naturally towards self-reference. Word lists were randomly assigned to each self-focus condition' (Farb et al. 2007, NF or EF). Participants were trained in the distinction between NF and EF. NF is characterized by … trying to figure out what the trait word means to the participant, whether it describes the participant, and allowing oneself to become caught up in a given train of thought'. EF is characterized 'as engaging present-centred self-reference, sensing what is occurring in one's thoughts, feelings and body state, without purpose or goal, other than noticing how things are from one moment to the next…'.

The results show that meditation experts are more able to differentiate the two states and that moment-by-moment self-experience 'may rely simply on task-related suppression' of those neural correlates that support NF. One of the most interesting by-product in this recent field of studies is that our brain does not necessarily stop its development after 25–30 years of age as usually accepted; and that the brain structure can change as a consequence of proper social practices such as meditation (Baime 2011). As 'determinants of happiness can be searched at two levels, external conditions and inner processes' (Veenhoven 1997, p. 4), contemplative studies focus their attention on the latter because if the orientation to ameliorate external conditions is an appreciable scope for social and economic policies, it is also true that limiting our endeavours to it is like 'trying to get blood out of a stone' (Ricard, p. 263). Moreover, the same orientation and commitment to social transformation is not exempted by traps. We should take care of ourselves

when committed to a social cause, be it a social justice problem, or a battle for a sustainable green economy. We all suffer from our attachments and this could be a case in point. As Julie Nelson observes '… even concepts of sharing and communalism can … become fixations, arising out of our desire to feel good about ourselves and be in control' (Nelson 2010, p. 2). This is what occurred and can occur again, especially if the two cultures, social sciences and contemplative studies, meet on the ground of the analysis of well-being and social justice. The oversimplification on which the utilitarian model of the homo economicus is based seduced also its opponents: contemplative practice can help us to avoid any dichotomous thinking and look at the system as it is, a net of complex interactions in which relational work is always operating. Understanding happiness through the art of dealing with suffering calls for an experiential model that it is still in its infancy. Generally speaking, my chapter deals with happiness as a life skill more than an event depending on external conditions: how to be happy is a matter of learning, like dancing, surfing or riding a bike.[17]

Contemplative practices deal with the 'inner manufacturing of feeling', a very sensitive matter as Veenhoven writes 'little is known of how our likes and dislikes are processed… Psychology has been more successful in grasping thinking than affect' (1997, p. 17). If our likes and dislikes can have their origin in an evolutionary process, it is also possible to hypothesize that our current mechanisms of reaction are linked to no longer existent conditions and we have not elaborated yet the life skills required by our times. The 'religious' model of the utilitarian man can correspond to the previous era.

This essay is grounded on the attempt to integrate contemplative knowledge/practices and social sciences and my aim is to show how the cultivation of human inner skills is the basis for happiness and how this can influence every other interaction. In a way, some results from happiness studies should not be taken as a landmark for developing proper policies but as the starting point of a cultural examination of collective behaviour. Being more specific, when Veenhoven underlines that studies show that happiness after achieving most desired goods of all sorts is short-term and, after a while, the achieved level is felt as mere routine, and the wheel of desire raises the target ('the way of the merchant' in this book), it could be intended not as the point of arrival but the starting point of the inquiry, as it is not a natural, taken for granted behaviour, just because it has the greatest number of followers. What people declare in questionnaires is more subtly felt, emotionally and sensorially, and these dimensions stay fully in the black box.

To sum up, a full understanding of individual well-being must be grounded on an enactive model of social science in which pursuing the integration between self-observational and narrative skills, questionnaire based surveys and neuroscientific outcomes.

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[17] Social characteristics influence for 10 % and the individual disposition (mainly 'the ability to control one's environment') for 30 % (Veenhoven 1997, p. 15).

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