
Editorial

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Biographical notes: B. Mak Arvin is a Full Professor of Economics at Trent University, Peterborough, Ontario, Canada, where he has been a faculty member for over 25 years. He is the author of over 100 papers and reviews in refereed journals as well as several books on many topics. He is associated with a dozen professional journals. He is the Editor-in-Chief of the *International Journal of Happiness and Development* and the Regional Editor of the *International Journal of Public Policy*. In addition, he is on the editorial board of eight journals and the Associate Editor of two more. He has been Visiting Professor to Boston College and Consultant to IFO Institute for Economic Research, Germany. His research focuses on applied microeconomics and development economics, especially the economics of happiness and the economics of foreign aid.

Happiness plays a pivotal role in our lives.¹ Layard (2006, p.224) maintains that ‘we are programmed to seek happiness’ and therefore ‘the best society is the happiest’. Given these commonly held sentiments, is it reasonable to assume that we should be concerned with the happiness of nations as opposed to the wealth of nations? If the answer is affirmative, it is then natural to ask how happy societies emerge. One answer may be through human or societal betterment², which can be attained through development over time. However, the setting is complicated by the realisation that development is a normative matter reflecting evolving experiences of individuals and their societies. Furthermore, the concept of happiness is not necessarily static since happiness may be defined in an intertemporal sense.

Notwithstanding these complications, an increasing number of academics and politicians have become interested in examining or emphasising the importance of happiness.³ For example, the 2009 Stiglitz report⁴ commissioned by French President Nicolas Sarkozy recommended that greater emphasis be placed on happiness relative to GDP in the development of public policy. Following suit, in November 2010 British Prime Minister David Cameron announced his government’s intention to measure happiness on a regular basis and to make happiness a goal of public policy.

One of the most exciting developments in the happiness literature has been the mix of theoretical and empirical studies to broaden our understanding of happiness and how it may relate to development from economic, political, psychological, or sociological perspectives. The study of happiness is quickly becoming both an interdisciplinary⁵ and multidisciplinary phenomenon.⁶ A major area of research is on the production of happiness itself. Researchers have been incredibly innovative in discovering factors that matter for happiness production and for developing sophisticated empirical techniques for testing their hypotheses. Not surprisingly, the most important factors that explain

happiness are physical and mental health, family situation, and employment status of individuals. Research has also shown that while money can generate happiness, being able to help others and having a sense of community are also important.⁷ Thus, happiness is inextricably related to one's own evolving conditions as well as to the development of other individuals. Another body of literature has concentrated on the consequences of happiness for both individuals and societies, asking questions such as whether happier people are more inclined to act pro-socially in helping others; whether happier societies disburse more foreign aid⁸ or have higher migrant remittances⁹; or whether happier nations enjoy elevated dimensions of development such as cleaner environments. Relatively few papers in this literature have gone beyond establishing correlations between happiness and other variables and searched for the possibility of causality, especially in both directions. For instance, it is quite conceivable that not only good health causes happiness, but happiness causes good health; and that not only marriage makes people happier, but happier people get married.¹⁰ In the same vein, future work on happiness will likely gauge whether happiness is affected by different dimensions of development as well as affecting those dimensions. These and many other questions are unexplored areas for research in this burgeoning field. Given the obvious connections between happiness and human and societal betterment, it is inevitable that as the topics of happiness and development grow in size and in following, these two areas will converge.

As indicated in our initial call for papers, *IJHD* invites submissions entertaining different measures of subjective well-being of individuals and various notions of development from all disciplines. The scope of its purview encompasses both theoretical and applied work that can improve our understanding of how happiness is generated and in particular how it may relate to development – interpreted at both micro and macro levels. Theoretical contributions must be well-grounded with reasonable assumptions and well-defined parameters. They need not use mathematical models. However, a conceptual framework is required. These papers must indicate why their conclusions are interesting and relevant to both researchers and practitioners in the field. Empirically oriented contributions should have a solid methodological foundation. They may be case or country specific studies; they may use a cross section of countries, or panel data. These papers must draw important lessons or highlight challenges for policy makers. In addition to theoretical, statistical, and experimental approaches to happiness, the journal also welcomes multicultural and philosophical analyses. In this regards, cross cultural analyses of happiness and development of interest to both anthropology and development will be entertained. In all, *IJHD* is devoted to analysis and discussion of the complete spectrum of development issues that include development of individuals, regions, or countries and how they pertain to happiness, broadly defined.

The range and quality of the papers in the first issue convey the journal's aspirations. Moreover, the distinction of our editorial board, as well as its diversity and composition, ought to signal what type of research we hope to attract for the coming issues. The editor, the associate editors, and the editorial board intend to work closely with reviewers to obtain a quick turnaround with average time to first decision within two months. In addition to original articles, *IJHD* will periodically publish book reviews, technical reports and comments, and review articles. Shorter articles with a special focus are also encouraged. Naturally, all papers in this and subsequent issues, whether submitted or invited, have been and will be subject to refereeing.

We hope academics, researchers, public servants, advocates, journalists, and policy makers are intrigued and excited to see how this journal brings together the fields of

happiness and development. We also hope that all will want to browse through the articles in the inaugural and future issues and consider submitting their work to *IJHD*.

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Notes

- 1 Happiness is only one measure of the subjective well-being of individuals. Diener (2006) outlines a wide spectrum of measures that can be used to describe subjective well-being which are various types of evaluations, both positive and negative and both short-run and long-run, that people can make of their lives. In disciplines such as economics, subjective well-being is often defined as an individual's long-term assessment of his or her life as-a-whole. In this sense, happiness captures how people judge their lives against personal aspirations or expectations and may be considered to be general life satisfaction. This is radically different than short term notions of subjective well-being which relate to immediate or recent feelings, such as joy or the imaginary hedonimeter Edgeworth posited in the late 19th century where heights of pleasure experienced by an individual could be continually registered [see Colander, (2007), p.216]. Indeed, happiness, a subjective and cardinal measure, and a response to many survey questions used in empirical work, is different than utility, an ordinal measure used in economics to reveal preferences.
- 2 Human betterment is a term used by Boulding (1972) who hypothesises existence of a non-linear betterment function. This notion can easily be generalised to societal betterment. Obviously, human betterment does not necessarily translate to social betterment if an individual's betterment comes at the expense of others' betterment (now or in the future) or if one's betterment generates negative externalities for the rest of the society. Economists will of course want to use the notion of marginal betterment, with its accompanying set of shadow prices.

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- 3 To wit, as early as 1972, the ruler of the small kingdom of Bhutan expressed an interest in using gross national happiness as a measure of the social progress of his nation.
- 4 See the *Report by the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress*.
- 5 See, for instance, Easterlin (2006).
- 6 Happiness has been a well-established field of study in psychology for many decades. In economics, the study of happiness has grown in popularity since the publication of Richard Easterlin's seminal work in the early 1970s discussing whether economic growth is happiness enhancing (see, Easterlin, 1974).
- 7 For example, Dunn et al. (2008) show that spending money on others may have a more positive impact on happiness than spending money on oneself.
- 8 See Arvin and Lew (2010) who find that happiness matters at the donor level, but not at the recipient level.
- 9 See Arvin and Lew (2012).
- 10 See Stutzer and Frey (2006).