

THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY  
SCHREYER HONORS COLLEGE

DEPARTMENT OF RISK MANAGEMENT

CONSUMER CAPITALISM'S CONDUCTIVENESS TO HAPPINESS:  
A FAÇADE OF FREEDOM

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Summer 2018

A thesis  
submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements  
for a baccalaureate degree in Risk Management  
with honors in Risk Management

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## ABSTRACT

Modern day consumer capitalism has created unprecedented economic growth, wealth, and prosperity. However, while incomes have risen, individual well-being has not followed. This paper looks at the economic, social, and political institutions which foster conditions that I will argue, are uncondusive to human freedom and human happiness. Easterlin's paradox, within the contemporary literature on happiness economics, displays that rising income, does not necessarily translate to improved well-being. Through mass commercialization, failed measures of well-being, and a flawed education system, economic prosperity is guised as an ultimate end above all else. By viewing other economic and political systems throughout the world, I propose new indicators of well-being, as well as an alternative education system, one which promotes critical inquiry, communal emphasis, and greater autonomy. This proposal aims at guiding a more critical understanding of how one's perception of reality is constructed, as well as the illusory promises of capitalist systems.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

Modern consumer capitalism has produced a way of life that has granted individuals much greater economic freedom (Cooray)<sup>1</sup>. Yet, despite all of the economic growth that has accompanied capitalism, humans remain alienated from one another, and overall less happy. This issue of modernity results from an underlying value that capitalism holds; money as the key to happiness. This value is systematically and institutionally engrained into American Society, and as a result, reinforced by its citizens, whether consciously or not. While income, up to a certain level, has a direct correlation with human well-being, it is not the source of “the good life” (Easterlin, 12)<sup>2</sup>. In turn, monetary wealth, as seen as an end in itself, creates a world of commodification and consumerism that detracts from true human freedom. It forces its participants to rely on happiness from the external rather than the internal.

One of the most prominent arguments in favor of capitalism claims this economic system to be natural, or one that most closely aligns with human nature. In his *Wealth of Nations*, Adam

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<sup>1</sup> Cooray, Mark. “Economic Freedom From The Western Democratic Tradition by M Cooray.” *Economic Freedom and Its Dependence on Capitalism by M Cooray*, [www.ourcivilisation.com/cooray/westdem/chap5.htm](http://www.ourcivilisation.com/cooray/westdem/chap5.htm).

<sup>2</sup> Easterlin, Richard A. “The Economics of Happiness.” *Daedalus*, vol. 133, no. 2, 2004, pp. 26–33., doi:10.1162/001152604323049361

Smith claims the human condition, one defined by self-interest, to advance the economy and therefore, societal well-being, stating, “By pursuing his own interest he frequently promotes that of the society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it.” He refers to this human nature as, “an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention” (Smith, 646)<sup>3</sup>. Smith’s words are grounded by a deeply profound assumption; the individual desire for more, results in the increased well-being of society as a whole. While Smith’s theories hold immense value within the classic economic paradigm, it is necessary to investigate his fundamental assumptions more closely. Complex questions must be addressed, such as; are humans selfish in their very essence, or does capitalism necessitate self-interest?

Capitalism currently stands as the most dominant global economic system, yet it is an extremely recent development within the context of human existence. In fact, “For 99.7% of human history, non-capitalist economic systems were dominant” (Nilsson, 34)<sup>4</sup>. Prior to the development of capitalism, societies were economically organized in a variety of ways, some by kinship production and others through feudal systems. In order to fully understand the true nature of capitalism, it is then vital reveal exactly how and where it derived from.

From the 12<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, much of Europe was governed by feudal societies. These societies were self-supporting economic systems, composed of a town center, and surrounding

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Nilsson. “Different Economic Systems.” 2017, doi:10.18411/a-2017-023.

agricultural areas. There existed two classes of people, namely, feudal lords or landowners, and peasants or serfs. Within these societies, “peasants were forced to work the land for a feudal lord in exchange for the right to build shelter on, and work a small strip of land” (Solfed)<sup>5</sup>. In essence, the peasants were completely reliant on the landowners (lords) for their means of survival. Feudal society maintained, “social and economic life characterized by the dominance of agriculture, and by production geared to meet immediate local needs” (Solfed)<sup>6</sup>. As a result, production and trade was limited to the confines of each locality. Restrictions were often placed on trade, to ensure that the lords maintained authority over their land. While this system operated in sectors of the world for many centuries, the introduction of foreign trade slowly began to undermine and corrode the feudal order. As a new class of merchant capitalists emerged, the increased use of money, and inflation began to destabilize the social relations of the lords and peasantry. As the first signs of capitalism began to penetrate these feudal societies, “the peasantry, who had been, to all intents and purposes, tied to the land and virtually owned by the lords, were set “free” - in other words, evicted” (Solfed)<sup>7</sup>. The land which they once occupied, was now deemed essential to help fuel the growing demand within the wool industry. As a result, feudal way of life was irreparably altered, leaving peasants devoid of any possessions, land, or money.

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<sup>5</sup> Solfed. “The Origins of Capitalism.” *Unit 1: The Origins of Capitalism | Solidarity Federation*, Solfed, [www.solfed.org.uk/a-s-history/unit-1-the-origins-of-capitalism](http://www.solfed.org.uk/a-s-history/unit-1-the-origins-of-capitalism).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

Through this transition, important discrepancies between feudal and capitalist societies are revealed. Under feudalism, peasants were in essence tied to the land, but able to retain direct contact with their means of production (the land and produce). Their necessities were all provided for, yet they did not technically own anything. Capitalism however, renders the worker completely alienated from their means of production (Sommerville)<sup>8</sup>. No longer able to occupy land, nor grow produce, the peasantry was forced to sell their labor in order to make a wage. The obliged farmer was in essence forcibly and violently transformed into a wage laborer. The power dynamics shifted from lord and serf, to employer and employee. Feudalism by its very nature, is concerned with subsistence not with profit. Making more money as an end in itself, was a concept unknown to feudal society, but introduced with capitalism.

An economy can be classified as capitalistic when all four of these criteria exist; products are produced as commodities, production is for profit, private ownership of capital goods used in production exists, and wage labor is used in production (Nilsson, 52)<sup>9</sup>. At the very heart of this system lies the ultimate goal of making and maximizing a profit. In order to achieve profit, the revenue made from selling a good must exceed the cost of producing it. This dynamic in turn creates an incentive for employers to maximize the output of their employees, while keeping their wages as low as possible. Under this system, the pursuit of monetary accumulation often

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<sup>8</sup> Sommerville, J.P. "Feudalism." *Feudalism*,  
faculty.history.wisc.edu/sommerville/123/feudalism.htm.

<sup>9</sup> Nilsson. "Different Economic Systems." 2017, doi:10.18411/a-2017-023.

takes precedence over the rights and humanity of employees. Furthermore, competition within the market necessitates constant growth in order for a firm or company to survive and remain in operation.

Smith's conception of humans as innately self-interested seems misguided. As displayed by the transition from feudal order to capitalism; individual selfishness does not drive capitalism, but rather capitalism necessitates it. Humans are by nature social beings, yet the modern American economic platform creates inequalities and oppressive dynamics which corrupt these essential relationships. If money in itself is not the key to human flourishing, then the driving economic, political, and societal forces must aim to reflect the factors that do contribute directly to well-being. This is an immense task, as there is hardly a consensus on a definition of happiness.

The recent paradigm revolving around happiness economics aims to solve this dilemma through determining objective measures of happiness. Questions remain however, if human happiness can be quantified through economic measures of wellbeing. The most pervasive issue in regards to understanding and facilitating happiness is that there exists a plethora of definitions, with no real universal agreement. Happiness has been an object of study since the emergence of intellectual thought. It spans the disciplines of psychology, sociology, biology, philosophy, and many others. Unsurprisingly however, "no simple theory about the nature of happiness enjoys much support among philosophers; there is not even agreement that such a theory is possible.

About the only thing everyone agrees on is that happiness is a complex and multi-faceted notion, one not easily reduced to a formula or slogan” (White, 6)<sup>10</sup>. The ambiguity revolving around the concept of happiness, makes studying it, and incorporating it into policy measures very challenging.

Happiness within the philosophical context, has typically been understood from two opposing narratives, namely hedonic wellbeing and eudaimonic wellbeing, This definitional incongruence further complicates the study of happiness. English philosopher, Jeremy Bentham’s concept of welfare was, “maximizing the contentment and pleasure of the greatest number of individuals as they experienced their lives – that is, people feeling happy on a day-to-day basis” (Graham)<sup>11</sup>. Bentham’s definition implies a momentary effect of happy feelings, or a contentment with present circumstances. This interpretation, viewing well-being as a subjective state of mind, most closely aligns with American society’s idea of happiness. Contrary to Bentham’s interpretation, Aristotle’s theory of happiness revolves around the Greek word, *Eudaimonia*, “eu,” meaning wellbeing or abundance, and “daimon”, meaning the power controlling an individual’s destiny (Graham)<sup>12</sup>. Aristotle emphasizes happiness as the ultimate purpose and end of human existence. Contrary to Bentham, Aristotle does not claim happiness to constitute momentary feelings of pleasure, but rather a goal which should be constantly strived

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<sup>10</sup> White, Mark D. “The Problems with Measuring and Using Happiness for Policy Purposes.” *Mercatus Center*, 14 Sept. 2016, [www.mercatus.org/publication/problems-measuring-and-using-happiness-policy-purposes](http://www.mercatus.org/publication/problems-measuring-and-using-happiness-policy-purposes).

<sup>11</sup> Graham, Carol. “Happiness Economics: Can We Have an Economy of Wellbeing?” *Happiness Economics: Can We Have an Economy of Wellbeing?* | *VOX, CEPR's Policy Portal*, [voxeu.org/article/happiness-economics-can-we-have-economy-wellbeing](http://voxeu.org/article/happiness-economics-can-we-have-economy-wellbeing).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

towards. Furthermore, happiness is intimately aligned with leading a life of virtue, and refining one's ability to exercise the will. The Aristotelian ideal of wellbeing, I claim, is a more accurate framework, but one which runs contrary to capitalism's essence, and offers a much greater challenge by means of measurement and policy implementation. According to this definition, material possessions and wealth are nonessential in the pursuit of human flourishing. Rather, it is straying from greed and eternally refining one's character, that leads to a happy and fulfilling life. If happiness is the ultimate goal of human existence, as Aristotle pronounces, then it must be the obligation of those in power, to facilitate conditions conducive to achieving this aspiration.

The American brand of capitalism, one oriented around money as the key to happiness, is misaligned with the Aristotelian idea of happiness, and has as a result led to stagnating levels of happiness despite rising incomes. Further, capitalism has systematically imbued flawed ideas about what constitutes individual happiness. Real institutional alterations to our current systems are only feasible when the underlying values held by our society are changed. This is no small feat, but can only be attained through a reformation of education, a new indicator of well-being, and the communication of new ideas about how society ought to be constructed.

This work is an attempt at understanding happiness from a capitalist perspective, whilst at the same time striving to highlight differences in interpretation amongst capitalist societies. The assumptions and analysis I make cannot therefore necessarily extrapolate to other locations. Section 2 covers the background to happiness economics, section 3 calls for a new global indicator of well-being, section 4 offers cross-disciplinary definitions of human happiness and freedom, and section 5 explores the role of education in the promotion of well-being.



## Chapter 2

### Happiness Economics

Over the past decades, a plethora of viewpoints have aimed at a better understanding of happiness, in order to tailor public policy for the benefit of society as a whole. The study of human happiness is one defined by extreme complexity and therefore takes a substantial interdisciplinary approach. Richard Easterlin, a vanguard in the study of well-being, analyzes some of the predominant cross-disciplinary understandings of what constitutes happiness. In his work, *The Economics of Happiness*, Easterlin disproves both the “set point theory” held by many psychologists, as well as the fundamental economic assumption of income’s correlation with happiness. According to many psychologists,

Each individual is thought to have a fixed setpoint of happiness or life satisfaction determined by genetics and personality. Life events such as marriage or divorce, loss of a job, and serious injury or disease may temporarily deflect a person above or below this set point, but in time each individual will adjust to the new circumstances, and return to the given setpoint. If this is correct, then there is little that you or I can do to improve our well-being, and public policies aimed at making people better off by improving their social and economic conditions are fruitless. (Easterlin, 2)<sup>13</sup>

Fortunately, Easterlin’s survey data indicates that major life events, do in fact have an enduring

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<sup>13</sup> Easterlin, Richard A. “The Economics of Happiness.” *Daedalus*, vol. 133, no. 2, 2004, pp. 26–33., doi:10.1162/001152604323049361.

effect on happiness. The implications of this conclusion are substantial; if happiness is able to be controlled and altered, then state governments must have an obligation to implement policies which promote its people's well-being. Yet, in order to achieve this feat, policy makers, and individuals alike must better understand the factors that contribute directly to their happiness. Another popular economic theory understands happiness to be susceptible to change, but change through the accumulation of wealth. Easterlin demonstrates this viewpoint showing that,

Economics places particular stress on the importance of life circumstances to well-being, particularly one's income and employment situation. The view that money makes you happier finds ringing endorsement in economic theory. The implication is that one can improve one's life satisfaction by getting more money, and that public policy measures aimed at increasing the income of society as a whole will increase well-being. (Easterlin, 2)<sup>14</sup>

Consumer Capitalism fully adopts this understanding of human prosperity. The American economy is driven by the desire for growth and accumulation of wealth. Our institutions serve as an incubator towards actualizing this ultimate goal. Pro economic growth ideals are deeply rooted into the American education, political, and legal systems. Yet, if the underlying belief that money contributes to human happiness is flawed, the entire foundation of our modern society must be called into question.

The works of Tibor Scitovsky touch on the allusion of economic growth. Scitovsky attests to the fact that consumption, productivity and income per capita have all increased within

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

the United States, yet a rise in social welfare has not followed these achievements. Moreover, despite the rising levels of these economic measures, a discontent pervades not only the poor, but the rich as well. In fact, “From 1946 to 1971, real per capita income in the United States rose approximately 60 percent. However, the percentage of people who considered themselves very satisfied, reasonably satisfied, or not fully satisfied with their lives remained essentially unchanged throughout the period” (Scitovsky, 19).<sup>15</sup> This phenomenon can in part be attributed to the notion that real income rises are insignificant. What matters is how income increases relative to others within society and how that increase affects movement through social class. Richard Easterlin emphasizes this point, which is referred to as the point-of-time relationship showing,

as far as material things are concerned, one’s satisfaction with life depends not simply on one’s own objective condition, but on a comparison of one’s objective situation with a subjective (or internalized) living level norm, and this internal norm is significantly affected by the average level of living of the people around us. At any given time, the living conditions, or real incomes, of others are fixed, and happiness differences depend, therefore, only on differences in people’s own, actual, income. (Easterlin, 13)<sup>16</sup>

As people’s incomes rise over time, so do their internal norms, or how they judge themselves to be happy. As these internal norms increase, they in turn devalue the effect of increasing income,

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<sup>15</sup> Scitovsky, Tibor. *The Joyless Economy: an Inquiry into Human Satisfaction and Consumer Dissatisfaction*. Oxford University Press, 1978.

<sup>16</sup> Easterlin, Richard A. “The Economics of Happiness.” *Daedalus*, vol. 133, no. 2, 2004, pp. 26–33., doi:10.1162/001152604323049361.

as people gain greater expectations about what their money will afford them, both in terms of material and social status. Due to this paradoxical effect, rising income will have a marginal effect on increases in happiness levels. If one's subjective living level is more influential than one's objective condition, then increases in income will not have any positive effect on well-being, as the incomes of others rise in parallel.

Sociologist, Alex Inkeles evaluates the idea of zero economic growth as an alternative to the commonly held belief of growth as universally beneficial. First, he explains that, "To the poor, zero growth is a cruel joke which implies acceptance of conditions which are morally intolerable and politically unacceptable as well as physically and spiritually uncomfortable. As long as people live in the desperate state of poverty characteristic of the developing world, the only meaningful question is not whether but how to grow" (Inkeles, 24)<sup>17</sup>. The distinction between developed and developing countries is a crucial one and serves as a macrocosm for progress on an individual level as well. While rising income levels may have only a marginal effect on happiness, there is a threshold up to which money can greatly increase standard of living and life satisfaction. In a 2010 study published by psychologist Daniel Kahneman and economist Angus Deaton, it was determined that, there is an income plateau of \$75,000 after which day-to-day contentment does not rise with increases in wealth.<sup>18</sup> This finding shows that in order to live a contented life, a certain level of income must be attained to cover essential

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<sup>17</sup> Inkeles, Alex. "Social Capital as a Policy Resource." 2001, doi:10.1007/978-1-4757-6531-1.

<sup>18</sup> Deaton, Angus, and Daniel Kahneman. "Understanding Consumption." Aug. 1992, doi:10.1093/0198288247.001.0001.

living expenses. Beyond this threshold however, increased income is not instrumental in day-to-day contentment.

Within this study, happiness is viewed through two differing understandings namely, emotional well-being, and evaluation of life. Emotional well-being refers to the day-day experience that makes life pleasant or unpleasant, whereas the second conception covers one's overall life satisfaction. The \$75,000 threshold is related to the primary idea of day-to-day well-being. The distinction shows that how exactly one defines happiness, greatly impacts the understanding of the underlying assumption drawn from the data. While Kahneman and Deaton's findings illuminate the temporary effect of income, they fail to capture a full and cohesive understanding of human happiness. This is where the works of philosophers, as well as global statistical models such as the World Happiness Report, can help frame an understanding of human happiness, and therefore the role that income can play within this most vital pursuit.

The World Happiness Report, first established in 2012, utilizes data from the Gallup World Poll to assess, rank, and analyzes the state of world happiness. In the most recent report, non-income determinants of subjective well-being are offered as possible explanations of America's stagnant levels of happiness, despite increasing prosperity. These various factors include, "population health (measured by health-adjusted life expectancy, HALE); the strength of social support networks; personal freedom (measured by the perceived freedom of individuals to make key life decisions); social trust (measured by the public's perception of corruption in

government and business); and generosity” (Sachs, 147)<sup>19</sup>. While per capita GDP has risen, these non-income factors have either not improved or deteriorated, providing possible explanations for individual discontent. The report also addresses America’s public health crisis, revolving around, obesity, opioid addiction, and major depressive disorders. In fact, The Center for Disease Control counted, “63,000 deaths from drug overdoses in 2016, marking an increase in the age specific mortality rate from 6.1 per 100,000 in 1999 to 19.8 per 100,000 in 2016” (Sachs, 152)<sup>20</sup>. This opioid epidemic offers insight into the corruptive forces which negatively influence civil society. The pharmaceutical giants, such as Purdue Pharma, whom introduced powerful prescription opioids such as OxyContin, have taken no preventive measures in combating opioid abuse, despite its steady and obvious rise. In the pursuit of maximum profits, these pharmaceutical companies have catalyzed drug abuse and addiction, making America the epicenter of global opioid manufacturing. In turn, The US has become, “the world’s most intense hotspot, with 764 DALYs (Opioid use disorders) per 100,000, followed by Russia (605), Iraq (578), and Iran (556)” (Sachs, 153)<sup>21</sup>. These unprecedented levels of drug addiction and abuse directly relate to another component of America’s health crisis, depression.

In a recent study, data drawn from the National Survey on Drug Use and Health found that, “Depression prevalence increased significantly in the U.S. from 2005 to 2015, before and after controlling for demographics. Increases in depression were significant for the youngest and

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<sup>19</sup> Sachs, Jeffrey D. “America’s Health Crisis and the Easterlin Paradox .” [s3.amazonaws.com/happiness-report/2018/WHR\\_web.pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/happiness-report/2018/WHR_web.pdf).

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

oldest age groups, men, and women, Non-Hispanic White persons, the lowest income group, and the highest education and income groups” (Sachs, 154)<sup>22</sup>. This mental health epidemic, distributed across all demographics, shows that income is inconsequential in accounting for depression. Rather, other factors such as declining social support systems, shifts in cultural norms (rise in materialism), and technological influences (social media dependence) can offer a lens into the causes of this crisis. As with both the opioid and depression epidemics, members of all demographics are affected, not just low-income groups. As a result, these detrimental issues cannot be attributed to or solved simply by high income levels or economic growth. America, remains the most prosperous nation on the globe, yet the heart of drug and mental disorders. These alarming conclusions point to a social and structural failure that must be addressed. Only then can the question of happiness and income be revisited.

As rising GDP may allude to increased well-being, it fails to effectively capture the deep-seated discontent which prevails. While Gross Domestic Product as a measure of development may inform of the growth levels of a nation’s economy, it does not capture or address the issues such as depression and opioid addiction stated previously. It can be seen that, “GDP is becoming an ever more misleading measure” (The Economist)<sup>23</sup>. In order to properly cure societal problems, the diagnostic tools used must be appropriate. GDP as a measurement tool of well-being, fails to do its job, as economic growth cannot be assumed synonymous with well-being.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> “The Trouble with GDP.” *The Economist*, The Economist Newspaper, 30 Apr. 2016, [www.economist.com/briefing/2016/04/30/the-trouble-with-gdp](http://www.economist.com/briefing/2016/04/30/the-trouble-with-gdp).

Therefore, more appropriate measures must be implemented and adopted, to more accurately and effectively measure levels of happiness.

In the following chapter, I will investigate the development of GDP and its misguided universal adoption. I will then look at alternative measurement tools, which better evaluate the development and well-being of society.

## Chapter 3

### GDP: Need for New Indicator of Well-Being

GDP as the primary evaluative tool of a nation's well-being marks a massive structural failure. GDP has been the key measure of societal and individual prosperity, but has missed key aspects that effect well-being, independent of income (Casse)<sup>24</sup>. As a result, economic and public policy have been tailored around promoting GDP growth with the underlying assumption that this will in turn increase individual happiness. As displayed by the Scitovsky, Inkeles, Easterlin, Sachs, and others, GDP is able to measure economic progress, yet fails to properly measure societal well-being. In addressing the aspects of life which GDP does not account for, Anita Ivkovic shows that,

Our gross domestic product is high, but there is much that it does not cover. It does not include the health of our families and children, the quality of their education or the pleasure of playing or the safety of our streets. It does not include the beauty of our poetry or the strength of our marriages, the intelligence of our public diplomacy and integrity. GDP measures neither our intellect nor our courage, neither wisdom, knowledge, nor our compassion or dedication to the country. In short, it measures everything except that which actually has real

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<sup>24</sup> Casse. "GDP and Economic Indicators of Wellbeing." *Center for the Advancement of the Steady State Economy*, 2017, doi:10.18411/a-2017-023.

meaning in lives. (Ivkovic, 260)<sup>25</sup>

If a country's gross domestic product is unable to account for the most vital qualitative attributes which contribute to well-being, then what does it accomplish? In its most simplistic terms, GDP measures the monetary value of all final goods and services produced within the border of a country and within a certain time period. Therefore, it serves as an overall measure of a country's economic output. It can be calculated by, "adding together a nation's personal consumption expenditures (payments by households for goods and services), government expenditures (public spending on the provision of goods and services, infrastructure, debt payments, etc.), net exports (the value of a country's exports minus the value of imports), and net capital formation (the increase in value of a nation's total stock of monetized capital goods)" (Hart, 3)<sup>26</sup>. This indicator can be extremely useful in evaluating the overall performance of an economy. Due to its universal use, GDP is effective not only for a country evaluating their own economic progress, but also for comparing the economies of different countries. Furthermore, "the great advantage of the GDP is reflected in the fact that it was the first measure of economic performance and activity" (Ivkovic, 263)<sup>27</sup>. Gross domestic product has set the precedent for a universal tool of economic comparison. Its simplicity and ease of use has rendered it valuable on a global scale, and therefore has remained the most utilized economic indicator.

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<sup>25</sup> Ivkovic, Anita Frajman. *Limitations of the GDP as a Measure of Progress and Well-Being*. University of Osijek, 31 May 2016.

<sup>26</sup> Hart, Maureen, and Robert Costanza. "Beyond GDP: The Need for New Measures of Progress." *The Pardee Papers*, Jan. 2009, doi:10.1007/s11205-011-9906-6.

<sup>27</sup> Ivkovic, Anita Frajman. *Limitations of the GDP as a Measure of Progress and Well-Being*. University of Osijek, 31 May 2016.

While economic growth can indicate certain advancements and positive trends within a country, there is still many aspects which it fails to address. Primarily, increased consumption and production within an economy does not necessarily equate to increases in welfare. For example, consider the effects of a national Influenza epidemic, in which “production and consumption of a number of goods and services may be expected to rise in response to extra demands created by the cold and the epidemic; the production and consumption of fuels, clothing, and medical services will tend to increase” (Ivokovic, 263)<sup>28</sup>. While these externalities would result in increased consumption and production of certain products and services, reflected as GDP growth, the overall welfare of this hypothetical country would not increase. Beyond, a failure to capture the true effect of many external events, GDP also fails to determine how increases in income amongst society are allocated. GDP measures average income, “which gives no indication of the distribution of income among citizens (not taking into account how the output produced is distributed in a given period - how much went to the rich, and how much to the poor people)” (Ivokovic, 266)<sup>29</sup>. Therefore, while this measure of economic performance can display an average increase in gross domestic product, it is highly possible that this increase was only reaped by the wealthiest citizens. GDP here fails to account for one of the most significant factors amongst an equitable society; distribution of wealth. Therefore, the allusive nature of the GDP fails to show what is most essential about growth, how the well-being of each societal class is affected.

Today GDP is often adopted as the most essential tool in assessing societal and individual well-being. However, its original purpose was not that of evaluating human prosperity. Rather,

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

“GDP estimates were used to show that the economy could provide sufficient supplies for fighting WWII while maintaining adequate production of consumer goods and services (Marcus and Kane 2007). This statistical measurement, initially developed prior to World War 2, was utilized to alleviate the growing concern that entering a war would result in massive decreases in the standard of living. It essentially served as a tool to pacify the masses, and help justify entering a global war by showing economic spoils would not be suffered as a result. Adopted universally to help combat economic instability, GDP measures became synonymous with well-being. Yet, as previously displayed, this conclusion is erroneous. The danger of conflating growth with welfare is enormous. Simon Kuznets, the chief architect of the United States national accounting system, “cautioned against equating GDP growth with economic or social well-being. The US Bureau of Economic Analysis’ description of GDP states the purpose of measuring GDP is to answer questions such as “how fast is the economy growing,” “what is the pattern of spending on goods and services,” (Hart, 4)<sup>30</sup>. These questions are valuable, and can aid in policy implementation to promote certain economic aspirations. Furthermore, GDP as a measurement tool is not inherently bad and has its purpose. Yet, while GDP will certainly remain an effective tool for economic analysis, its findings must not be misconstrued as an encompassing measure of well-being. It fails to show the most influential factors in improving the human condition. It can then be seen that, “the economy has to be more than just the

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<sup>30</sup> Hart, Maureen, and Robert Costanza. “Beyond GDP: The Need for New Measures of Progress.” *The Pardee Papers*, Jan. 2009, doi:10.1007/s11205-011-9906-6.

production and consumption of things; higher goals and better ways of measuring country performance are necessary” (Cobb et al., 1995)<sup>31</sup>.

An alternative measure, Gross National Happiness, has therefore been adopted by some governmental organizations in order to more accurately assess the true state of a nation and its peoples. This measure, originally coined by “the 4th King of Bhutan, King Jigme Singye Wangchuck, in 1972, implies that sustainable development should take a holistic approach towards notions of progress and give equal importance to non-economic aspects of wellbeing” (OPHI)<sup>32</sup>. It serves as a measurement tool alternative to GDP, which more appropriately guides public policy and discourse. The Gross National Happiness Index is composed of 9 various domains, “psychological wellbeing, health, education, time use, cultural diversity and resilience, good governance, community vitality, ecological diversity and resilience, and living standards” (United Nations)<sup>33</sup>. Beyond these 9 essential domains, this index identifies four classes of citizens, unhappy, narrowly happy, extensively happy, and deeply happy. Through addressing the vital influences of human well-being, the Gross National Happiness indicator, “explores the happiness people enjoy already, then focuses on how policies can increase happiness and

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<sup>31</sup> Cobb, C., T. Halstead, et al. 1995. If the GDP is Up, Why is America Down? *The Atlantic Monthly*. 276: 59–78.

<sup>32</sup> OPHI, [ophi.org.uk/policy/national-policy/gross-national-happiness-index/](http://ophi.org.uk/policy/national-policy/gross-national-happiness-index/).

<sup>33</sup> “Gross National Happiness Index - United Nations Partnerships for SDGs Platform.” United Nations, United Nations, [sustainabledevelopment.un.org/partnership/?p=2212](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/partnership/?p=2212).

sufficiency among the unhappy and narrowly happy people” (OPHI)<sup>34</sup>. The radically benevolent work of the Bhutan Government serves as inspiration to the rest of the world. Their guiding ideal of societal and individual well-being above all else, offers a noble example of what governments can accomplish when greed and self-interest are dissolved. The Gross National Happiness Indicator is so influential, that “In 2011, the UN unanimously adopted a General Assembly resolution, introduced by Bhutan with support from 68 member states, calling for a “holistic approach to development” aimed at promoting sustainable happiness and wellbeing” (OPHI)<sup>35</sup>. Bhutan’s example of happiness as the central and defining goal of a nation remain promising and a cause for optimism.

The Gross National Happiness indicator relies on a multitude of dimensions that formulate overall happiness. This conception differs greatly from Western ideals of well-being, and may more accurately address what contributes directly to human prosperity. Typical of the Western world, measurements of happiness, have either been economic driven, or completely self-reflective, in the form of subjective well-being reports. The GNH offers a more encompassing understanding of happiness which takes into account multiple perspectives. Within Gross National Happiness, “comes a range of domains of human wellbeing including traditional areas of social concern such as living standards, health, and education, while some are less traditional, such as time use, psychological well-being, culture, community vitality, and environmental diversity” (OPHI)<sup>36</sup>. While this account of happiness may bring a more cohesive

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

understanding of what a society demands in order to thrive, there remain many issues in attempting to measure and fully fathom human happiness.

As philosopher Daniel Haybron alludes, happiness has typically been conceived in three varying manners, namely, hedonic pleasure, life satisfaction, and a person's emotional state. The first two examples, require one to evaluate their own life and make judgements about whether or not they consider themselves to be happy. Psychology has often relied on these modes of evaluating well-being via subjective well-being tests, as touched upon earlier. These tests, utilized in an attempt at better understanding human happiness, require the subject to be completely self-reflective in their assessment, maintaining a deep and authentic knowledge of one-self. Unfortunately, the allusive nature of happiness renders even our own judgements of ourselves, clouded and dubious. Is it even truly possible for one to be a completely objective, non-bias assessor of their own well-being? If the greatest scientists and philosophers alike fail to fully capture the meaning of happiness, how can we on an individual level be certain of our own happiness? These questions will continue to hinder progress in the studies of happiness. As shown by Haybron, "happiness may function as an umbrella term, covering a number of related phenomena without specifying any one of them" which in turn fails to, "generate reasonable confidence in the meaning and relevance of the results of any attempt at measurement" (White, 8)<sup>37</sup>.

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<sup>37</sup> White, Mark D. "The Problems with Measuring and Using Happiness for Policy Purposes." *Mercatus Center*, 14 Sept. 2016, [www.mercatus.org/publication/problems-measuring-and-using-happiness-policy-purposes](http://www.mercatus.org/publication/problems-measuring-and-using-happiness-policy-purposes).

Furthermore, the concept of happiness differs greatly among different regions of the world as well. For example, psychologists Luo Lu and Robin Gilmour, conducted a study which asked students of both the United States and China what happiness meant to them. Interestingly, the answers differed greatly with, “American students’ answers emphasizing individualism and materialism, while Chinese students’ answers were based on communitarian and spiritual concerns” (White, 9)<sup>38</sup>. This discrepancy brings forth two extremely enlightening points. The first being that conceptions of happiness differ not only from individual to individual, but regionally as well. Secondly, the society in which one is raised, substantially drives their ideas about what is essential for their happiness.

Beyond the Gross National Happiness measure, exists an alternative indicator of development, which emphasizes the importance of individual freedoms to a nation’s growth. The Human Development Index (HDI), similarly to the GNH, does not focus primarily on GDP as an indicator of a countries’ well-being. Rather, “The Human Development Index (HDI) is a summary measure of average achievement in key dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, being knowledgeable and having a decent standard of living” (United Nations Development Programme)<sup>39</sup>. This measurement tool derives from the influential works and ideals of philosopher and economist, Amartya Sen. In his work *Development as Freedom*, Sen advocates for human freedom as not only an end, but a means to development. The common

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> “Human Development Reports.” / *Human Development Reports*, United Nations Development Programme, [hdr.undp.org/en/content/human-development-index-hdi](http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/human-development-index-hdi).

thought amongst many economists, that individual freedoms can be addressed only after a certain level of economic development is met, is fundamentally opposed by Sen. Sen's central ideal revolves around, "a 'capability approach', where the basic concern of human development is 'our capability to lead the kind of lives we have reason to value', rather than the usual concentration on rising GDP, technical progress, or industrialization" (Sen, 285)<sup>40</sup>. Furthermore, "His approach 'inescapably focuses on the agency and judgment of individuals'" including their capability, responsibility, and opportunity (Sen, 285)<sup>41</sup>. Sen asserts that improving human capability not only leads to improved freedom and well-being of individuals, but in turn improves social and economic conditions as a result. It is therefore of the utmost priority, that a nation's governance values and prioritizes institutional reforms focusing on granting greater individual liberties. This shifting focus will in turn create happier citizens who contribute more productively to a growing economy.

Development goals revolving around increasing GDP alone have failed to increase individual well-being. This failure, as Sen alludes, derives from a refusal to address the most vital factors which grant individuals greater agency. Here, the distinction between human capital and human capability must be made. Sen displays that, "Human capital is important, as it refers to the agency of people in augmenting production possibilities. Yet human capability is more important because it refers to the substantive freedom of people to lead the lives they have reason

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid

to value and to enhance the real choices they have” (Sen)<sup>42</sup>. Education remains an integral part in enhancing human capability. Sen asserts that education is, “crucial beyond its role in production; its most important role being that of increasing human capability and therefore choice” (Sen)<sup>43</sup>. In the later chapters, I will further explore how a failed education system reinforces faulty ideals which inhibit human freedom. With a refocus on education and its role in individual and societal development, positive alterations can be made. Furthermore, the development of both the Gross National Happiness indicator, and the Human Development Index, signal the need for a reevaluation of societal priorities. GDP as a measure of growth has failed to augment well-being, yet these new measures, prioritizing human freedom over economic growth, can help lead to a more just and happy society.

In the next Chapter, I will touch on the works of some of humanity’s most prominent philosophers. Through an investigation into their ideals about freedom, education, and happiness, a more cohesive understanding of the problems and possible remedies which plague modern society, can be achieved.

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<sup>42</sup> Sen, Amartya. “Amartya Sen's Development as Freedom: Ten Years Later.” *Development Education in the Era of Globalization | Development Education Review*, [www.developmenteducationreview.com/issue/issue-8/amartya-sens-development-freedom-ten-years-later](http://www.developmenteducationreview.com/issue/issue-8/amartya-sens-development-freedom-ten-years-later).

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Philosopher's Discussion**

The problem of modernity is one that is grounded in deep historical roots. Plato was one of the first philosophers to address the flaws of democratic institutions. His criticism revolved around the unyielding entanglement of wealth and power within democratic systems. Moreover, just as long as the wealthy maintained authority, the masses would be divided and alluded from truth. Plato was weary of the fact that wealth acted as a precursor to rule, yet it did not distinguish competence in actually ruling over others. Rather, it allowed the wealthy to use power to enhance their own riches, allowing the needs of society to fall by the wayside. This greed associated with the ruling class, is a characteristic that has pervaded throughout history, and perpetually inspired deception. Many philosophers of the last century have shared these same critiques, in the hopes of constructing societies devoid of such deception.

Expanding upon Plato's views, he believed that the rulers of a society must not take joy or comfort in their roles. Rather than glorifying the positions of those in power, the political realm should be seen as a daunting yet vital obligation. Plato perceived these experienced and informed citizens, as guardians of the city, claiming, "they'll put in more hard labor at political life, ruling each in turn for the city's sake, not as though they were doing some beautiful thing

but something unavoidable” (Plato, 238).<sup>44</sup> Ultimately, by removing the honor that comes with political power, these guardians will be rid of all self-interest, acting in the exclusive interest of society. Questions remain regarding the feasibility of a ruling class such as the one Plato outlines, yet his sentiments ring true; those in power must reflect the ideals of society as a whole. In order for the welfare of society as a whole to advance, the crippling self-interest driving those in power must be expunged. It is through education and philosophy that a generation of political human beings can be crafted, and political corruption can be eliminated.

Consumer capitalism encourages economic freedom through a limitation of state intervention in the lives of egoistic individuals. Yet, as Karl Marx alludes, this notion of freedom is disingenuous. There remains an incongruence between the ideals that capitalism promises, and the actual reality of how the system operates. Marx presents this important point claiming, “a state may be a *free state* without man himself being a *free man*” (Marx, 32).<sup>45</sup> Capitalism creates a civil society composed of egoistic individuals whom operate with the primary pursuit of making money. As a result, individuals are ruled by an external force which is completely outside of their control. This system, one built on the need for individuals to sell their labor in order to survive, has emphasized the accumulation of material wealth as an end in itself. Marx shows this when he states, “Money is the universal and self-sufficient value of all things. It has, therefore, deprived the whole world, both the human world and nature, of their own proper

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<sup>44</sup> Plato, and Robin Waterfield. “Plato on Political Education.” *Republic*, Oxford University Press, 2008.

<sup>45</sup> Marx, Karl, and Richard A. Davis. “~On the Jewish Question~™.” *Marx: Early Political Writings*, pp. 28–56., doi:10.1017/cbo9781139168007.006.

value” (Marx, 50).<sup>46</sup> Due to the immense value placed on making money, individuals operating within capitalism are not truly free, as their lives are controlled by the incessant need for monetary gain. As a result, the entire world has in a sense been commodified, and authentic human freedom, has been exchanged for market freedom.

Marx effectively illuminates the injustices and inequalities that prevail within this capitalist system. Yet, his ideas on overcoming the economic restraints to human freedom differ from many other philosophers, namely Gramsci. Orthodox Marxism believes in economic determinism, or the assertion that the market is the guiding force of reality and is independent of human control. This view devalues the power of action in implementing institutional change. Furthermore, Orthodox Marxism holds that history moves in an inevitable and uncontrollable trajectory, and one can only attempt to understand its progression over time. This framework regards economic law as truth and ideas about what society should be, as illusory. Therefore, systematic change occurs regardless of the ideas that prevail within a society.

Gramsci holds an opposing and more optimistic view in achieving societal change, placing ample importance on the communication and education within society. In evidencing the French Revolution, Gramsci shows that, “every revolution has been preceded by an intense labour of criticism, by the diffusion of culture and the spread of ideas amongst masses of men who are first resistant” (Gramsci, 58).<sup>47</sup> Institutional change therefore comes about only through

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Giroux, Henry A. “Radical Education and Culture in the Work of Antonio Gramsci.” *Stealing Innocence*, 2000, pp. 109–136., doi:10.1007/978-1-137-10916-3\_5.

the construction of a unified consciousness. The working class must be educated on their oppression and forced to question the norms that govern society. This communal critique of norms in turn creates a culture of skepticism and conscious awareness. Once this conscious elevation of civil society occurs, individuals can be guided to the truth of their oppression and as a result, mobilize to revolt. Gramsci presents how this raising of conscious would look, stating, “we must form some idea of nature and its laws in order to come to know the laws governing the mind. And we must learn all this without losing sight of the ultimate aim: to know oneself better through others and to know others better through oneself” (Gramsci, 59).<sup>48</sup> Understanding oneself through others, is a concept that Marx also proposes. He believes that the essence of man is social and that individuals derive meaning through their interactions, or relations to other individuals. The conscious elevation which Gramsci speaks of revolves around straying from self-interest, toward a community driven identity.

Happiness is a concept which capitalistic society has greatly misconstrued. As Plato asserts, happiness is not conjured through external goods or wealth, but rather is a life-long continual process. Well-being cannot be achieved simply through economic growth or increased production and consumption. Capitalism, as perceived as a natural system, teaches self-interest as an innate human attribute. However, at our very core, humans are social creatures, deriving meaning from social interaction. Consumer Capitalism, promoting individualism, and monetary gain as paramount, in turn deteriorates these fundamental relationships. Society, which devalues a higher social good, promotes alienation and greed. The inextricable entanglement of wealth

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

and power creates an obstruction to overcoming the flaws which plague capitalism. In order to achieve an evolved society, one which promotes freedom and individual wellbeing as ends in themselves, then education must play an indispensable part.

The American education system reflects many of the flawed ideals produced by capitalistic culture. Creating new ideas about what a just, and socially conscious society may look like, requires a revision to the institutions which shape the perception of future generations. Through instilling a critical consciousness, education maintains the ability to fundamentally change beliefs about how our world ought to be constructed, and shape the players who can bring these ideals to fruition.

## Chapter 5 Education in the Promotion of Well-Being

Education remains a staple in Gramsci's assessment of overcoming economic injustice. Much of the inequality and discontent found in modern day consumer-capitalist society derives from an intrinsically flawed education system; one that does not encourage meticulous thought, questioning or assessment of presumptions. Rather, this system encourages obedient students, whom develop the skills necessary to staff the "industrial machine". The bourgeois education tells those who fail to do well, that they are inadequate and inferior to their classmates, in turn legitimizing societal inequalities. Schools do not operate with the sole intention of educating. Rather they exist, "to reproduce consumer-capitalist society" (Trainer, 3).<sup>49</sup> A consequence of this defective system is that it produces competitors, or people who "focus on advancing their own welfare without much interest in the public good or collectivism and who see education as a legitimate system which allows the super-rich to thrive" (Trainer, 1).<sup>50</sup> Through standardized testing, and competitive grading systems, students are pitted against one another, and develop understandings of self, based on how they perform amongst their peers. As a result, students can become discouraged and apathetic towards a system which deems them unintelligent,

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<sup>49</sup> Trainer, Ted. "Education Under Consumer Capitalism and The Simpler Way Alternative." 2012, doi:10.18411/d-2016-154.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

inadequate, and inferior. While this style of educating reflects the competitive nature that defines capitalist society, it does not create conditions conducive to instilling a desire to learn.

The relationship between wellbeing and education are well noted within Aristotle's *eudaimonic* interpretation of happiness. Aristotle asserts, happiness comes not only with virtue, but the quench for knowledge as well. He claims that intellectual contemplation and curiosity, "perpetuates that natural wonder to know which begins in childhood but seems to be stamped out soon thereafter" (Aristotle)<sup>51</sup>. This innate love of learning, one closely associated with wellbeing, is crippled by the American education model. Rather than placing happiness as the goal of education, it has been more concerned with the ideals of economic growth and productivity. However, wealth and economic prosperity have failed as satisfactory indicators of wellbeing. Therefore, education as an institution has failed. It seems that the American model of education robs students of their desire to learn, and therefore the happiness associated with this natural inclination.

Beyond this failure, the American model of education does not work to produce happy students. Happiness and education are intimately connected, as displayed not only by Aristotle, but contemporary statistical analysis as well. A study in the United Kingdom explored this relationship between well-being and education, and came to substantial conclusions.

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<sup>51</sup> "Aristotle." *Pursuit of Happiness*, [www.pursuit-of-happiness.org/history-of-happiness/aristotle/](http://www.pursuit-of-happiness.org/history-of-happiness/aristotle/).

When asked to rate measures of their well-being on a scale of zero to 10 (where zero means “not at all” and 10 means “completely”), graduates gave a mean score of 7.7 for life satisfaction and 8.0 for feelings of worthwhileness, compared with 7.4 and 7.7, respectively, for non-graduates. Graduates also reported being happier than those without a university qualification (7.5 compared with 7.3) (Bothwell)<sup>52</sup>.

Further, the happiness associated with education cannot be explained solely by increasing economic opportunity. Rather, “the value for a higher education qualification extends to greater personal benefits and an increased sense of worth, which graduates carry with them long after they finish their studies” (Bothwell)<sup>53</sup>. This study helps illuminate the need for a restructuring of the American education system. If, education in itself can help increase societal well-being, its focus must be revised, placing self-growth as its essential function. It seems that, happiness should therefore be an aim of education, and a good education should contribute significantly to personal and collective happiness’ (Noddings)<sup>54</sup>.

As Gramsci points out, education should not merely teach the presumptions held by society as absolute truth, but teach students to question their realities and build a conscious self-awareness. This cannot be accomplished through fact memorization or traditional examinations.

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<sup>52</sup> Bothwell, Ellie. “Degrees of Happiness: Graduates Report Higher Well-Being.” *Times Higher Education (THE)*, 30 Nov. 2017, [www.timeshighereducation.com/news/degrees-happiness-graduates-report-higher-well-being#survey-answer](http://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/degrees-happiness-graduates-report-higher-well-being#survey-answer).

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Noddings, Nel. “Happiness and Education.” 2003, doi:10.1017/cbo9780511499920.

It must be dynamic and variant, allowing individuals to pursue their own interests. Most importantly, education must not be seen as an obligatory path towards making money, but rather a perpetual process of self-growth and understanding. Therefore, the desire to learn must be an end in itself, but it can only become that, if students are invested and engaged in their education. An institutional change of the education system cannot come about until there is a consensus of what true education should be.

Scandinavia offers an interesting glimpse into what this education may look like. Scandinavian Countries produce students that have some of the most proficient math and science skills in the world, yet their modes of instruction differ greatly from those of the United States. Interestingly, these countries did not utilize, “competitive grading, standardized testing, and top-down accountability – all staples of the American education system” (Stransbury).<sup>55</sup> Finland accredits their massive success not only to these aspects, but the educational reforms of the 1970’s which ensured primary education for everyone in the country. Not only do all children begin formal schooling at age 7, but they also participate in “extensive early-childhood and preschool programs focused on self-reflection and social behavior, rather than academic content” (Stransbury)<sup>56</sup>. As emphasized by both Gramsci and Marx, this early foundation of positive social relations and self-awareness bring children closer to what is most essential to their freedom and humanity. It grants them with the ability to think for themselves, not automatically accepting all information given to them as fundamental truths. The Scandinavian model revolves around

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<sup>55</sup> Stransbury, Meris. “US Educators Seek Lessons from Scandinavia.” 2008, doi:10.18411/d-2016-154.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

encouraging philosophical thought from a very young age to inspire continuous learning. Much of their success can be attributed not only to these different modes of instruction, but the value that Scandinavian society itself places on teachers and education. For example, in Finland, “teaching is one of the most highly venerated professions in the country – and only one in eight applicants to teacher-education programs are accepted. All teachers have master’s degrees” (Stansbury)<sup>57</sup>. Furthermore, “In Finland, it is a tremendous honor to be a teacher, and teachers are afforded a status comparable to what doctors, lawyers and other highly regarded professionals enjoy in the U.S” (Lynch)<sup>58</sup>. This is a stark difference from the quality and perception of teaching positions within the United States.

The contrast between education in America and Finland offers a prime example of how the values of society are deeply reflected within its institutions. In Scandinavia, where quality education is highly prioritized, teachers are incentivized by a desire to make a positive impact on students’ lives, shaping the next generation. While teachers in America may share these same beneficial sentiments, there is a much lower demand for highly qualified teachers, as education is not as greatly valued. Beyond this, there is also little incentive for Americans to pursue a career in teaching, as salaries are notoriously low, and the overall respect granted to education as a profession is lacking. These values, engrained into the American educational system, have dire consequences for teachers and students alike. Where there is little incentive to teach, there is

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Lynch, Matthew. “3 Issues That Are Hurting the American Educational System.” *The Edvocate*, 26 May 2016, [www.theedadvocate.org/3-issues-that-are-hurting-the-american-educational-system/](http://www.theedadvocate.org/3-issues-that-are-hurting-the-american-educational-system/).

little incentive to learn. Therefore, in order to substantially improve American education, the ideals that surround it must be fundamentally changed.

One of the most important ideas about education is that, growth must not be measured in terms of production or material, but in terms of self. The nature of standardized testing and competitive grading, forces students to compare themselves to their peers. This in turn can discourage students from yearning to learn, as struggling within this system deems them unintelligent. For example, take a student who scored a 40 percent on a math examination. This grade would be considered a failure. This same student takes the math exam for a second time and scores a 55%. While the student improved by an admirable 15%, their work is still deemed a failure by traditional grading standards. So therefore, even if the student vastly improved, grasping a much better understanding of the content, this self-growth is not realized but rather punished. The Scandinavian countries have institutionally removed this unproductive mode of instruction and assessment, in pursuits of a more noble ideal of what education should be.

Through a focus on self, students are guided by constant growth or improvement, and are not constrained by opaque standards which must be met. Furthermore, Scandinavia's educational focus on fostering effective social relations, help points to its consistent ranking as the happiest countries in the world. As pointed out by Dr. Jan-Emmanuel De Neve, "The Scandinavian countries are very big on social support, showing the top countries, you can see, have societies which are not at each other's throats" (Rahim)<sup>59</sup>. Scandinavian society is

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<sup>59</sup> Rahim, Zamira. "Happiness Report: Why Does Scandinavia Always Win?" *Time*, Time, 20 Mar. 2017, [time.com/4706590/scandinavia-world-happiness-report-nordics/](http://time.com/4706590/scandinavia-world-happiness-report-nordics/).

fundamentally opposed to American, in this sense that social support rather than competition is a driving force. This emphasis on fostering inclusive and productive social communities, is reflected within the Scandinavian education model, and acknowledges the social nature of human beings. The American model, one molded by the economic principles of capitalism, creates “man who is alienated from himself, his fellow men, and from nature. He has been transformed into a commodity and experience his life forces as an investment which must bring him maximum profit obtainable under existing market conditions” (Fromm, 67)<sup>60</sup> Education plays the most prominent role in shaping both the ideals and happiness of individuals. A model which necessitates competition over self-improvement, has failed to produce happy students. In accepting the relationship of education and happiness, and viewing Scandinavia as the archetype of modern education, a systematic alteration of American education is absolutely necessary in addressing the promotion of human happiness.

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<sup>60</sup> Fromm, Erich. *The Art of Loving. Fromm*. Harper & Row, 1962.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Conclusion**

To fulfill the demands of an inhuman system, one relinquishes much of their freedom. The western consumer-capitalist system, constructed upon money as its orienting principle, creates an insatiable desire for wealth. As a result, utility is confused to be happiness, and the entire world becomes commodified, losing all intrinsic meaning. Capitalism, is institutionally designed to alienate, as individuals are seen in the context of oppressor and oppressed (employee and boss). These artificially constructed relationships poison social interactions, as they reinforce economic inequalities. Our institutions, such as our education system reflect these poor values, and further alienate individuals from each other and from their own humanity. In order to fully liberate this society, its citizens must be made aware of the oppressive and unnatural forces that dictate their lives. Only through the construction of this conscious awareness, can consumer-capitalist be systematically revolutionized.

As I have proposed, in order to achieve enduring change, one which works towards a more socially conscious, equitable, and happy society, than a few things must occur. First, the economic measures such as GDP which have been adopted universally, must not misconstrue prosperity as well-being. Rather, indicators measuring the factors which contribute directly to

well-being must be adopted. Secondly, the American education system must be reevaluated and restructured. A focus on self-growth must permeate through these institutions, ensuring an environment optimal to instilling a desire to learn. By altering the competitive environment which can produce ambivalent, disinterested and discouraged students, a refocus of what true education should look like can manifest. Countries such as Finland, Sweden, and Bhutan have proved that these institutional reforms are not just lofty utopian ideals, but can result in real progress.

Just as long as wealth and power remain inseparably aligned, creating any lasting societal change will remain an enormous obstacle. In order to change our education and how we use economic measures, decisions must be made by those at the very top. These necessary and vital decisions, may very well oppose the self-interest of those holding the most power. The insatiable desire for wealth, propagated by consumer capitalism, may in fact be the most difficult roadblock, in positively altering society.

Furthermore, the ambiguity and cross-cultural understandings of happiness, make its study and implementation into public policy challenging. Well-being is inherently subjective. While there are factors which can be controlled, ones that always contribute to improved happiness, much of how well-being is defined relies on each individual subject. Because of this, finding a set definition of happiness, that can be universally agreed upon, may not even be possible.

While these challenges may render further study difficult, they should not fully hinder working towards a better understanding of individual well-being. In order to continue to progress towards a happier and freer society, investigations into the components most deeply tied to individual well-being must be continued. Beyond this, studies revolving around how public policy decisions can impact happiness remain absolutely essential. While happiness and the role of government in promoting it as an end, presents huge challenges, they are challenges which are of the utmost importance and must be tackled head on.

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# ACADEMIC VITA

## Jeffrey Singer

◆ (508) 785 5275 ◆ Jas7015@gmail.com ◆ Natick, MA

### EDUCATION

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#### **The Pennsylvania State University – The Schreyer Honors College**

*The Smeal College of Business*

Class of 2017

Bachelor of Science in Risk Management–Real Estate

Minors: Philosophy & International Business

#### **University of Cape Town**

CIEE: Arts and Sciences

Cape Town, South Africa

Jan 2016 – Jun 2016

#### **Massachusetts Board of Real Estate**

License No. 009539787

Jan, 2016

### WORK EXPERIENCE

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#### **Keepers Child Safety, Tel Aviv, Israel**

*Business Development/Marketing*

Jun 2017 – August 2017

- Conducted market research, exploring viability of expansion to the US
- Launched pilot of application
- Assisted Developers with design and quality assurance
- Utilized different marketing platforms to catalyze organic growth

#### **Eastport Real Estate, Waltham, MA**

*Property Management*

Jun 2016 – Aug 2016

- Worked collaboratively with tenants to ensure the maintenance of over 10 commercial properties
- Operated autonomously, fulfilling appointed tasks in an efficient manner and reported back to management

#### **Camp Young Judaea, Amherst, NH**

*Head of Athletic Department*

Jun 2015 – Aug 2015

- *Managed a team of over 20 counselors facilitating camp-wide athletic activities*
- *Scheduled daily activities for 350 campers. Organized and executed inter-camp sporting events*
- *Mentored staff on teaching and coaching skills, managing camper behavior and adhering to camp policies*

#### *Counselor & Head Waiter*

Summer 2012, '13, '14

- Managed 40 waiters and ensured dining room systems were implemented to provide timely and effective meal service for 350 campers
- Supervised 20 campers from ages 10 to 16. Managed daily activities to provide a positive camp experience

### LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE & ACTIVITIES

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#### **Alpha Epsilon Pi Fraternity**

*Executive Board Member*

State College, PA

Jan – May 2015

- Govern the judicial board and act as Community Involvement Chairman
- Establish rules and guidelines for members and oversee compliance among the 100 member organization

#### *Judicial Chairman*

Jan – May 2015

- Manage member compliance and promote responsibility by enforcing fraternity regulations.
- Resolve conflicts by overseeing the 10-member standards committee, hearing cases and implementing judicious decisions

#### **Global Ambassadors/ Smeal Global Representative**

Sep 2016 - Present

- Help develop initiatives to increase student involvement in study abroad opportunities
- Give presentations to campus organizations on the benefit of international academic experience

#### **Real Estate Society, The Pennsylvania State University**

Sep 2015 – Present