



Vol 15, N° 1

<https://revistas.usb.edu.co/index.php/IJPR>

ISSN 2011-2084

E-ISSN 2011-7922

## The Price of Happiness in Modernity: a Question of the State or Individuals...?

El precio de la felicidad en la modernidad: cuestión de estado o de individuos...?

Mauricio Cuartas-Arias<sup>1,\*</sup> 

<sup>1</sup>*Department of Psychology, School of Humanities, Universidad Eafit. Medellín, Colombia.*

### OPEN ACCESS

**\*Corresponding author:**

Mauricio CuartasArias  
Email: [jmcartasa@eafit.edu.co](mailto:jmcartasa@eafit.edu.co)

**Copyright:** ©2022. International Journal of Psychological Research provides open access to all its contents under the terms of the license [creative commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International \(CC BY-NC-ND 4.0\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/)

**Declaration of data availability:** All relevant data are within the article, as well as the information support files.

**Conflict of interests:** The author has declared that there is no conflict of interest.

**How to Cite:**

Cuartas-Arias, M. (2021). The price of happiness in modernity: a question of the state or individuals...?. *International Journal of Psychological Research*, 15(1), 6–8.  
<https://doi.org/10.21500/20112084.5924>



Ah, happiness... that wonderful and ideal state of mind that we will all reach one day if we set our minds to it... or will we?

What if I told you that happiness is overrated, that we frantically yearn to get into the pursuit of happiness and get profusely involved in social networks, displaying ideal and happy profiles, and reviewing those of others, in such a way that we end up competing for who has the happiest existence.

In the face of this senselessness, in this stormy pursuit of happiness, in a world that also offers —and by far— many sorrows for that heavenly and paradisiacal blue with which we try to paint our social and personal profile, we must take an alternative to save our mission, our challenge, to be happy.

Given this premise, happiness has been offered in modernity as a mechanism of social control. So far, several countries have associated happiness as an important factor in the population, as it is the case of the GDP (gross domestic product), and it is unquestionable that this has economic implications and can contribute to reshaping social optimism as a central axis of productive changes and prosperity of the states. In this regard, countries such as Canada, Great Britain, and France have valued this indicator in their economies. A few years ago, the Prime Minister of the United Arab Emirates, Sheikh Mohamed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, included a Ministry of Happiness in his government structure, a call for social goodness, and an increase in the levels of subjective satisfaction of his population (Monaco, 2016).

However, I believe that one of the best examples of establishing happiness as a state policy is the Kingdom of Bhutan, a nation of approximately 780,000 inhabitants, located in the Himalayas, between China and India. In this Asian kingdom, since 1972 King Jigme Singye Wangchuck has remodeled the concept to measure wealth, initially associated with the economic indicator GDP, and replaced by the Gross National Happiness (GNH). However, this innovative way of estimating the productive capital of its inhabitants and the positioning of its state economy should not be confused with the concept

of “Subjective Well-being”. Bhutan favors the search for the collective well-being of its citizens based on four fundamental axes: environmental conservation, sustainable and equitable socio-economic development, the preservation and promotion of culture, and good governance (Togay et al., 2011).

Although the construct of GNH does not adjust to balance human transit, learning to alleviate the pain of existing or the daily conquest of the beauty of the habitual, and much less it is enough to offer the ideal eudaimonic-hedonic balance of human becoming, it could be related to the public instrumentalization of a responsible and cooperative relationship with the environment. Therefore, it is evident that this type of approach to happiness from the governmental structures of the states, in principle, safeguards, at least, not to lose the future and to offer its population scenarios of social inclusion, as a preliminary bet of collective welfare. Social inclusion goes beyond the state privilege of access, as governments must take early responsibility for the cognitive development of their inhabitants by combating maternal and child malnutrition and facilitating the development of cognitive skills in their population, which are precisely those that suggest critical thinking about their individual processes of adaptation and wellbeing (citation 6). Furthermore, when we want to estimate well-being from a state policy, the additional indicator that should be taken into account is to assess how its population makes judgments, of course cognitive, own and collective, related to their vital moment and adjusted to the predictions of well-being, in coherence with the policies of their countries. Therefore, considering the management of positive social relations, the cognitive capital of its inhabitants to face adversity and stress, the degrees of job satisfaction according to competencies, and the development of a healthy lifestyle by managing restorative leisure, are fundamental to reviewing the scope of its public policies of inclusion and well-being of the population (Cajiao et al., 2013).

However, this is still a challenge not yet overcome even for many developed countries: in particular, Bhutan faces difficulties related to high public debt, a high rate of youth unemployment, and problems of inequality among its inhabitants. It is noteworthy that by the 2017 census almost half of the indigenous population had migrated from their place of origin (International Monetary Fund, n.d.).

From this perspective of ministries and public institutions that seek to operationalize happiness from the public function in different countries, inclusion in a broad social spectrum is fundamental, but I believe that it goes beyond belonging to a social program. It is necessary to enable alternatives in its population, which allow them to go beyond estimating in a consumer society happiness as the central axis underlying the acquisition of goods and services or as a way to achieve social hierarchy, to overcome happiness with the nickname of

hedonism, and to avoid succumbing to social reinforcement. Those could be some of the keys to controlling the lock of our brain reward circuit and not surrendering to temporary happiness.

Likewise, enabling people to develop their talents, recognizing the importance of their skills and their role in social cooperation dynamics are relevant to adding years of a happy life. However, do we recognize happiness in ourselves? Part of the answer lies in the concept of inclusion, that is, access to health, employment, housing, culture, and education. Perhaps the other part lies in social connection and what derives from it, feeling involved and emotionally connected with others, managing a differentiating role that triggers a switch of cooperation, a hierarchical and evolutionarily privileged behavior above other species, which also exhibits prestige, recognition in the social niche and, of course, the support of others in individual and collective purposes.

In addition, with social connection and cooperation, which may suggest the presence of previously studied domains such as compassion and sexual bonding in the establishment of lasting or stable interpersonal relationships, life satisfaction is also permeated by genes and personality. These last two domains directly impact the balance between pleasure and purpose, a concept extensively reviewed by Paul Dolan in his book *Design Your Happiness* (2014).

On the other hand, in the domain of personality and genetics, which makes us more or less efficient in distributing dopamine, noradrenaline, and serotonin in our brain, among other neurochemicals, I want to include, in the equation of life satisfaction or prolonged subjective well-being, the concept of “time” and how our brain perceives it, exhibiting an extraordinary capacity to predict and project into the future; weighing the implications that this could have on free will, our brain reviews the past to infer the future and access in a comfortable way to the decision (Kringelbach & Berridge, 2010).

Some time ago I heard Dr. Joaquin Fuster respond to the question “where is memory?”, saying that it was in the network or Cognito, referring to neural networks and not exclusively to a cortical structure. Well, in the same way, we could suggest that time is computed in these neural circuits at such a deep level within the nervous system and at the same time with different clocks for each cortical circuit, that to execute actions that indicate to the human being that it saves time, contributes significantly to the balance of pleasure and purpose. From my point of view, there is enormous satisfaction in saving time, and our brain understands this and activates pleasure circuits in it (hedonic well-being) that can save time in the pursuit of purpose (eudaimonic well-being). Here we formulate the new balance that underlies that of well-being: time learning; when you learn, your cortical clocks change and enjoyment is unveiled.

## References

- Cajiao, G., Morales-Arias, D. L., Garzón-Romero, G. C., Benavides-Basante, L., & Acevedo-Rincón, J. L. (2013). Revisión de algunos avances en la literatura sobre variables predictoras concernientes al Bienestar Subjetivo. *Cuadernos Hispanoamericanos de Psicología*, *13*(1), 57–72.
- Dolan, P. (2014). *Happiness by design: Change what you do, not how you think*. Penguin.
- International Monetary Fund. (n.d.). World Economic Outlook Database. Bhutan. <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2019/02/weodata/weorept.aspx?pr.x=84&pr.y=7&sy=2>.
- Kringelbach, M. L., & Berridge, K. C. (2010). The neuroscience of happiness and pleasure. *Social Research*, *77*(2), 659.
- Monaco, E. (2016). Notes on Bhutan's Gross National Happiness and its measurement. *Journal of Management and Development Studies*, *27*, 1–15.
- Paredes-Arturo, Y. V., Zapata-Zabala, M. E., Martínez-Pérez, J. F., Germán-Wilmot, L. J., & Cuartas, M. (2019). Capacidad intelectual en niños con desnutrición crónica. *Revista de Investigación e Innovación en Ciencias de la Salud*, *1*(2), 87–95.
- Tobgay, T., Dophu, U., Torres, C. E., & Na-Bangchang, K. (2011). Health and Gross National Happiness: review of current status in Bhutan. *Journal of Multidisciplinary Healthcare*, *4*, 293.