

Call for Paper:
An International Interdisciplinary
Conference on “Progress, Happiness,
and Public Policy”

Organizing Committee : Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences, Lingnan University (Members to be confirmed)

Editors: Yew Kwang Ng (Monash University) and Lok Sang Ho (Lingnan University)

Date: June 24 and 25, 2005 (Friday and Saturday)

Venue: Lingnan University

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Motivation:

Humanity has progressed a lot materially, but it is not clear if people are happier than their forefathers. Technological progress means that we have broken many former physical barriers, and our power in terms of making an impact on the natural environment and the ecological system is huge and unprecedented. Under the forces of globalization and competition, for example, in Indonesia deforestation is going on at the rate of the size of 300 soccer fields per hour. It is time we take stock of what we have achieved, where we are heading, and what we can do to procure a better future for humanity. The proposed conference and book to be published will consist of the following three main themes:

- *What is progress? How happy are people today cf. their ancestors?*
- *What make people happy?*
- *What role may policy play to enhance happiness*

It is hoped that this multidisciplinary conference will bring philosophers, historians, political scientists, economists, sociologists, psychologists, religious leaders, social workers, health workers, etc. together in an exchange of ideas about the meaning of progress and where humanity is heading in terms of happiness.

Please consider the following and let us know where your contribution may fit in. Send your abstract to us at ihss@Ln.edu.hk

Progress, Happiness, and Public Policy
A Volume to be edited by
Yew Kwang NG and Lok Sang HO

Introduction to the Volume (to be written by the Editors)

Part I: The Fundamental Questions:

- What is the meaning of happiness?
- Is promoting happiness an objective of public policy or is it entirely a private matter?
- Is it the same as, or is it related, to “utility”
- Is happiness important? Are there other things more important?
- Can happiness be measured?
- What is the meaning of progress?
- Can progress be measured?
- Does competition bring about progress?
- How are we doing in terms of happiness and progress compared to our ancestors?
- What do philosophers say? Is there an evolution in the main stream view, if there is such? How do we interpret the changes in views over the course of history?

Part II: The Determinants of Happiness/Unhappiness

- Relationship between wealth and happiness
- Relationship between health and happiness
- Happiness over the life cycle: is happiness related to the stage of the life cycle
- Relationship between happiness and family life: rearing children, caring for the sick and the old, having time together; marriage and divorce
- Is happiness determined by relative “achievements” and relative consumption rather than absolute levels of achievements and absolute levels of consumption? If this is so for some people, can this be changed? Why is it different for other people?
- Happiness and the occupations; suicide rates among different occupations
- Material goods and material bads versus “mental goods”(such as a sense of achievement and self worth) and “mental bads”(such as a sense of loss and a lack of self esteem)
- What kind of activities make people happy? Philanthropy, religion, work, pleasure seeking activities, etc.
- What is the role of competition?
- What is the role of culture? the media? social psychology?
- The role of a purpose: purposes that can by definition be achieved by some versus purposes that can be achieved by all

Part III: The Role of Public Policy and Institutions

- Is capitalism contributing to happiness?
- Does formal democracy(universal suffrage and party politics) make people happy?
- What kind of democratic institutions(such as freedom of the press and a liberal constitution that protects human rights) may make people happy?
- Can education make people happy? How may education make people happy?
- The role of social safety nets/insurance

mechanisms

- The role of redistributive policies
- The role of law and public order and perceived fairness/justice
- The role of globalization

Conclusions(to be written by the editors)

Appendix: **Happiness Research – some links**

- Ng, Yew-kwang(2002) The East-Asian Happiness Gap : Speculating on Causes and Implications.
<http://fol.math.sdu.edu.cn/tyx/content/content.php?id=99&tb=wlg>
- [Paul Krugman on "Pursuing Happiness" and happiness research](#)
- [World Database of Happiness](#), from the Erasmus University of Amsterdam.
- ["Honor Versus Hedonism: A Cross-cultural Analysis of the 'Missing Link' Between Income and Subjective Well-being"](#). Paper abstract from University of Michigan.
- [Observer UK story: Martin Seligman and "Authentic Happiness"](#).
- [Dr. Seligman's web site.](#)
- [Book review: *The Progress Paradox: How Life Gets Better While People Feel Worse*, by Gregg Easterbrook.](#)
- [*The Progress Paradox* at Amazon.com.](#)
- [TCS Article:Richard Layard - Income and Happiness.](#)
- [A page on Dr. Layard with links to .pdf versions of his lectures.](#)
- [Article: Daniel Gilbert and Affective Forecasting.](#)
- [Daniel Gilbert's homepage](#)
- [NYT article: Barry Schwartz on "maximizing" and "satisficing"](#).
- [Barry Schwartz. "The Tyranny of Choice" in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.](#)
- [Schwartz's book *The Paradox of Choice: Why More is Less*.](#)
- John McCarthy's page
<http://www-formal.stanford.edu/jmc/>

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Please send any feedback to David Ji at jyx@ln.edu.hk.

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