

HAPPINESS



Questions:

1. *What does happiness mean to you?*
2. *Make a top 5 list of things that a person should have done in life before he dies, so that he can say, "I lived a happy life".*
3. *Look up the following 3 definitions and discuss the concepts:*
 - *hedonism*
 - *Lotus-eater*
 - *altruism*

TEXT: Are humans selfish or altruistic by nature?

For a long time, there has been a general assumption in our culture that "human nature" is essentially negative. Human beings — so it was assumed — are strongly disposed to traits like selfishness, domination, and warfare. We have strong natural impulses to compete with one another for resources, and to try to accumulate power and possessions. If we are kind to one another, it's usually because we have ulterior motives of some form. If we are good, it's only because we have managed to control and transcend our natural selfishness and brutality.

This view of human nature has been justified by biological theories like the "selfish gene" (as popularized by the UK science writer Richard Dawkins) and the field of evolutionary psychology. Evolutionary psychology describes how present-day human traits developed in prehistoric times, during what is termed the "environment of evolutionary adaptedness" (EEA). The EEA is usually seen as a period of intense competition, when life was a kind of Roman gladiatorial battle in which only the traits that gave people a survival advantage were selected, and

all others fell by the wayside. Life was such a struggle that selfishness and the desire for power and wealth were "selected" by evolution. Because people's survival depended on access to resources (such as rivers, forests, and animal groups), there was bound to be competition and conflict between rival groups, which led to the development of traits like racism and warfare.

This seems logical. But in fact the assumption it's based on — that prehistoric life was a competitive struggle for survival — is completely false.

Prehistoric Abundance

It is important to remember that in the prehistoric era, the world was very sparsely populated. As a result, it is likely that there was an abundance of resources for hunter-gatherer groups. According to some estimates, around 15,000 years ago, the population of Europe was only 29,000, and the population of the whole world was no more than half a million. With such small population densities, it seems unlikely that prehistoric hunter-gatherer groups had to compete against each other for access to resources, or had any need to develop ruthlessness and competitiveness or to go to war.

There are other ways in which prehistoric life was relatively easy, too. Hunter-gatherers had a good diet — one that was arguably better than many modern people's, with no dairy products and a wide variety of fruits, vegetables, roots, and nuts, all eaten raw, as well as meat. This partly explains why skeletons of ancient hunter-gatherers are surprisingly large and robust, and show few signs of degenerative diseases and tooth decay. Prehistoric hunter-gatherers were also much less vulnerable to

disease than later peoples. In fact, until the advances of modern medicine and hygiene of the 19th and 20th centuries, they may well have suffered less from disease than any other human beings in history.

Contemporary Evidence

There is also significant evidence from contemporary hunter-gatherer groups who live in the same way as prehistoric human beings. One of the striking things about such groups is their egalitarianism. As the anthropologist Knauft has remarked, hunter-gatherers are characterized by “extreme political and sexual egalitarianism” (1). Individuals in such groups don’t accumulate their own property and possessions; they have a moral obligation to share everything. They also have methods of preserving egalitarianism by ensuring that status differences don't arise. This is done by sharing credit and putting down or ridiculing anybody who becomes too boastful. The !Kung of Africa swap arrows before going hunting, and when an animal is killed, the credit does not go to the person who fired the arrow, but to the person to whom the arrow belongs. If a person becomes too domineering or too arrogant, the other members of their group gang up against them or ostracize them. Typically in such groups, men have no authority over women. Women usually choose their own marriage partners, decide what work they want to do, and work whenever they choose to, and if a marriage breaks down, they have custody rights over their children. Other recent research on contemporary hunter-gatherer groups has shown that men and women tend to have equal status and influence, leading to the suggestion that sexual inequality only began to emerge with the development of agriculture (2).

Altruism and Egalitarianism

So there is no reason to think that selfishness and cruelty are natural to human beings. There is no reason why traits such as racism, warfare, and male domination should have been selected by evolution since they would have had no benefit to us. In fact, as we have seen, individuals who behaved selfishly and ruthlessly would be *less* likely to survive, since they would have been ostracized from their groups. On the contrary, it makes more sense to see traits such as cooperation, egalitarianism, altruism, and peacefulness as natural to human beings. These were the traits that were prevalent in human life for tens of thousands of years, during the so-called era of evolutionary adaptedness, and so presumably these are the strongest traits in us now.

Of course, you might argue that if this is case, why do present-day humans often behave so selfishly and ruthlessly, and why are negative traits, like warfare and male domination, so normal to many cultures? However, we should perhaps view these traits as the result of environmental and psychological factors. Research has shown repeatedly that when the natural habitats of primates (such as chimpanzees) are disrupted, they tend to become more violent and hierarchical. So perhaps something similar has happened to us, since we gave up the hunter-gather lifestyle and switched to farming, and then started to live in towns and cities. Another possible theory (which I put forward in my book *The Fall*) is that the "fall" into warfare and hierarchy (and other negative traits) was related to a psychological change that occurred in some groups of people, beginning around 6,000 years ago: the development of a heightened sense of individuality and separateness. At any rate, these negative traits developed so recently that it's not feasible to explain them in adaptive or evolutionary terms.

It is therefore inaccurate to portray human beings as genetic machines who are only concerned with their own survival and replication, and whose selfish and ruthless nature is the inevitable consequence of their prehistoric struggle to survive. The "good" side of our nature is much more deep-rooted than the "evil" side.

SOURCE:

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/out-the-darkness/201807/alternative-view-human-nature>

Questions:

- 1. Explain the point of view of those who believe that humans are selfish by nature.*
- 2. How does the author counter this theory of innate selfishness?*
- 3. Which theory do you find most convincing? Why?*

TEXT: How to make the world happier – and why it should be our first priority

Richard Layard

Whoever is happy will make others happy too... How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world.

Anne Frank, The Diary of a Young Girl

There is a wind of change in our society. People are talking about feelings. Even men are doing it. Relatively recently Prince William and Prince Harry talked for the first time about their mother's death and how it affected their own mental health. All around there is a new undercurrent – a greater concern with our own inner life and with how other people feel. A new, gentler culture is emerging.

By contrast, the older culture, which still dominates, is altogether harsher. It is more focused on externals. It encourages people to aim above all at personal success: good grades, a good job, a good income and a desirable partner. This culture of striving has brought many blessings, and life today is probably as good as it has ever been in human history. But that culture also involves a lot of stress, and people wonder why – if we are now so much richer than previous generations – we are not a lot happier.

The answer is surely the ultra-competitive nature of the dominant culture. The objective it offers is success compared with other people. But, if I succeed, someone else has to fail. So, we have set ourselves up for a zero-sum game: however hard we all try to succeed, there can be no increase in overall happiness. An alternative, gentler culture offers a different aim, which can lead to a win–win outcome. It says that we should

of course take care of ourselves, but we should get as much happiness as possible from contributing to the happiness of others. Competition, it argues, is valuable in the right context – and that context is competition between organisations. This has been a major engine of progress. But what we need between individuals is mostly cooperation, not competition. We want people who will act for the greater good – at work, at home and in the community. This produces better results for everyone. But above all, it makes life more enjoyable. For people long to relate well to each other – as an end in itself and not just as a means to something else.

My main proposal is that we should each of us, in all our choices, follow the Happiness Principle: we should aim to produce the greatest happiness that we can – and especially the least misery. This noble vision does not go against basic human nature. For all of us have two inherited traits – one selfish and one altruistic. The selfish side believes that I am the centre of the universe and my needs come first. This trait was important for our survival as a race, and we should indeed take good care of ourselves and of our own inner equilibrium. But the altruistic side enables us to feel what others feel and to strive for their good. This is vital for a happy society.

In 2015, the Dalai Lama was in London launching a new course, Exploring What Matters. At one point a woman came on to the stage. She was in pain and on crutches. For years she had been mostly bedridden and often depressed. But then she enrolled on the course. It changed her life. She realised that, by helping others like herself, she could give meaning to her life. The Dalai Lama embraced her. Later on, he was asked: “What is the most important thing for a happy life?” Without hesitation, he replied: “Warm heart.”

In the end it is each of us as individuals who will determine the levels of happiness in our society – by everything we do.

SOURCE:

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/jan/19/why-world-needs-new-politics-happiness-can-we-be-happier-evidence-and-ethics-richard-layard>

Question:

1. Write down the 3 most important ideas of this text in your own words.

TEXT: BHUTAN AND HAPPINESS

Definitions:

GDP

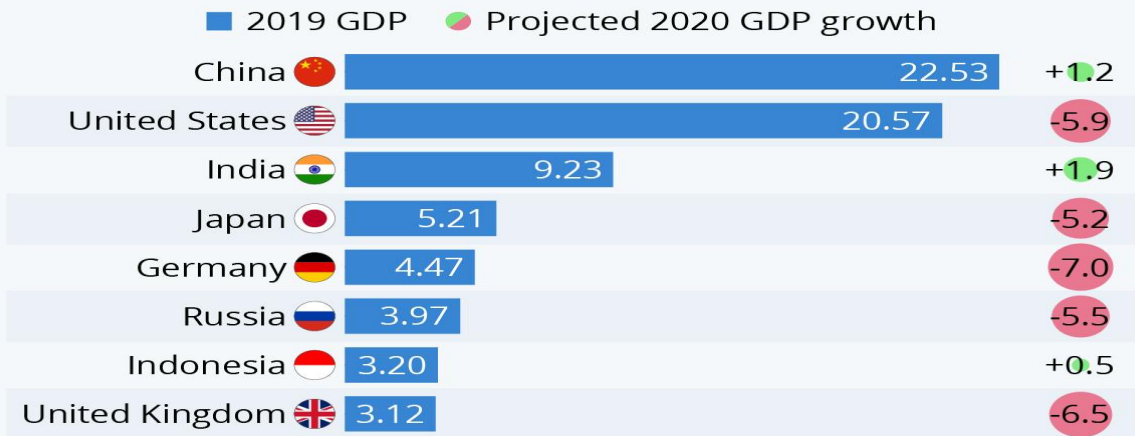
Gross domestic product, or GDP, is a **measure used to evaluate the health of a country's economy**. It is the total value of the goods and services produced in a country during a specific period of time, usually a year. GDP is used throughout the world as the main measure of output and economic activity.

TASK:

Most countries calculate the well-being of a society using the GDP as the primary indicator. Some critics question this approach. Look at the two charts below and draw conclusions.

The Biggest Economies in the World

Countries with the biggest GDPs (in trillion U.S. dollars) and their growth outlooks



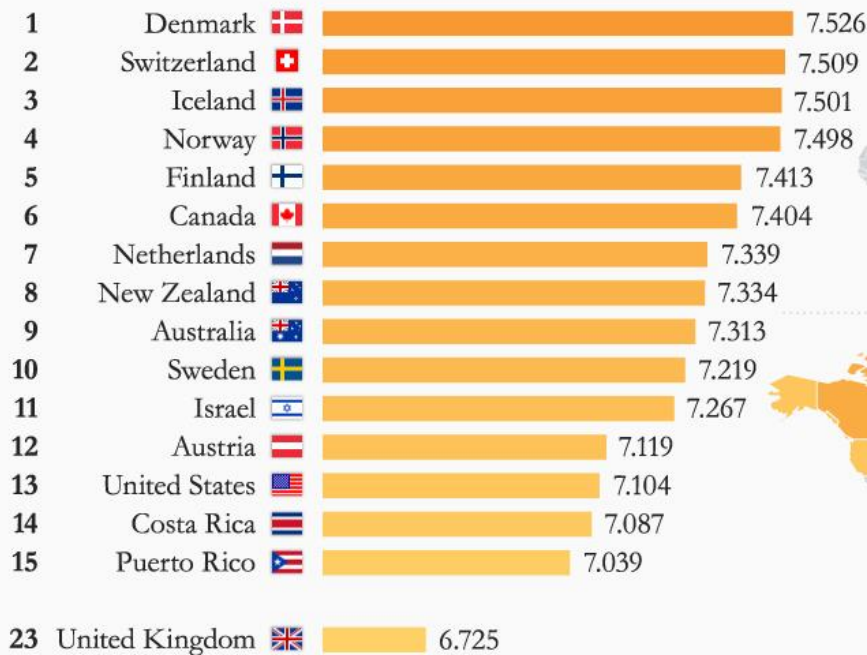
At constant 2017 prices, purchasing power parity/real GDP growth
Sources: IMF and World Bank



statista

The world's 15 happiest nations

Index ranking of happiness worldwide from 2013 to 2015



Source: World Happiness Report 2016

INDEPENDENT

statista

TEXT: Bhutan and Gross National Happiness (GNH)

Gross national happiness (GNH) is a measure of economic and moral progress that the king of the Himalayan country of Bhutan introduced in the 1970s as an alternative to gross domestic product. Rather than focusing strictly on quantitative economic measures, gross national happiness takes into account an evolving mix of quality-of-life factors.¹

The kingdom of Bhutan's first legal code, written at the time of unification in 1729, stated that "if the government cannot create happiness for its people, there is no purpose for the government."²

Understanding Gross National Happiness (GNH)

King Jigme Singye Wangchuck told the Financial Times in a 1972 interview that "gross national happiness is more important than gross national product."³ It is not clear how seriously King Jigme had thought through this new metric, but Bhutanese scholars have since picked up the idea and run with it. The GNH has evolved into a somewhat scientific measure of the once-isolated kingdom's economic and moral development.

Key Takeaways

- Gross national happiness (GNH) is a measure of economic and moral progress that the country of Bhutan introduced in the 1970s as an alternative to gross domestic product.¹
- The "four pillars" of GNH are good governance, sustainable development, preservation and promotion of culture, and environmental conservation. ¹

- The Bhutanese government takes the four pillars of GNH into account when deciding to pass laws.¹

In 1998, the government of Bhutan established the Center for Bhutan Studies and Gross National Happiness (CBSGNH) to conduct research on the topic. The institute's mandate was to develop a GNH index and indicators that the government could build into its public policy decisions. Bhutan could then share this framework with the outside world, with which the isolated Himalayan country was increasingly in contact.⁴

To that end, the GNH Center in Bumthang developed what it calls the four pillars of GNH. These are good governance, sustainable development, preservation and promotion of culture, and environmental conservation. The 2008 constitution dictates that lawmakers must take each into account when considering new legislation.¹

These pillars provide the foundation for the happiness, which is manifest in the nine domains of GNH: psychological well-being, standard of living, good governance, health, community vitality, cultural diversity, time use, and ecological resilience.¹

SOURCE

<https://www.investopedia.com/terms/g/gnh.asp>

QUESTIONS:

- 1. How exactly is the GNH different from the GDP and what is its purpose?*
- 2. What is your opinion on the GNH?*