



Chapter 1

SETTING THE STAGE

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Introduction

The first *World Happiness Report* was published in April 2012, in support of the High Level Meeting at the United Nations on happiness and well-being, chaired by the Prime Minister of Bhutan. Since then we have come a long way. Increasingly, happiness is considered to be the proper measure of social progress and the goal of public policy. This is the fourth *World Happiness Report*, and it is different in several respects from its predecessors. These differences relate to timing, content and geography.

In April 2015, we were already in the throes of planning for the *World Happiness Report 2017*, on the assumption that we would have, and need, somewhere between 18 months and two years to undertake the depth and range of research we wanted to cover. However we were invited to prepare a shorter report in 2016—the *World Happiness Report 2016 Update*—that would be released in Rome in March 2016, close to World Happiness Day (March 20th). Twelve months after that we plan to release *World Happiness Report 2017*, with the usual broad range of chapters based on global research, this time including separate chapters focused on two large global sub-populations, in China and Africa respectively. Further plans include deeper analysis of workplace happiness, and the happiness implications of immigration, refugees, and transient populations.

Given the short time available since the launch of *World Happiness Report 2015*, this *Update* has only three chapters beyond this introduction, one from each editor. Chapter 2, by John Helliwell, Haifang Huang, and Shun Wang, contains our primary rankings of and explanations for life evaluations, significantly expanded this year to include analysis of the inequality of well-being, based on the distributions of happiness levels within and among societies. Chapter 3, by Richard Layard, deals with the links between happiness and secular ethics. Chapter 4, by Jeffrey Sachs, discusses the close connection between

happiness and recently agreed upon Sustainable Development Goals.

At the suggestion of our Italian hosts, and under separate editorial direction, we have this year, for the first time, a companion volume containing five research papers for presentation at the 2016 launch conference in Rome—the 2016 *Special Rome Edition*. Four of the five papers are by Italian authors, and the other reviews a variety of links between human flourishing, the common good, and Catholic social teaching. We shall provide a brief overview of each after we first outline the contents and main findings of the *World Happiness Report 2016 Update*.

Chapter 2: The Distribution of World Happiness (John Helliwell, Haifang Huang, and Shun Wang)

In this report we give new attention to the inequality of happiness across individuals. The distribution of world happiness is presented first by global and regional charts showing the distribution of answers, from roughly 3,000 respondents in each of more than 150 countries, to a question asking them to evaluate their current lives on a ladder where 0 represents the worst possible life and 10, the best possible. For the world as a whole, the distribution is very normally distributed about the median answer of 5, with the population-weighted mean being 5.4. When the global population is split into ten geographic regions, the resulting distributions vary greatly in both shape and average values. Only two regions—the Middle East and North Africa, and Latin America and the Caribbean—have more unequally distributed happiness than does the world as a whole.

Average levels of happiness also differ across regions and countries. A difference of four points in average life evaluations, on a scale that runs from zero to ten, separates the ten happiest countries from the ten least happy countries. Three-quarters of the differences among countries, and also among regions, are accounted for by differences in six key variables, each of which

digs into a different aspect of life. The six factors are GDP per capita, healthy years of life expectancy, social support (as measured by having someone to count on in times of trouble), trust (as measured by a perceived absence of corruption in government and business), perceived freedom to make life decisions, and generosity (as measured by recent donations). Differences in social support, incomes and healthy life expectancy are the three most important factors. International differences in positive and negative emotions (affect) are much less fully explained by these six factors. When affect measures are used as additional elements in the explanation of life evaluations, only positive emotions contribute significantly, appearing to provide an important channel for the effects of both perceived freedom and social support.

Analysis of changes in life evaluations from 2005-2007 to 2013-2015 continue to show big international differences in the dynamics of happiness, with both the major gainers and the major losers spread among several regions.

The main innovation in the *World Happiness Report Update 2016* is our focus on inequality. We have previously argued that happiness, as measured by life evaluations, provides a broader indicator of human welfare than do measures of income, poverty, health, education, and good government viewed separately. We now make a parallel suggestion for measuring and addressing inequality. Thus we argue that inequality of well-being provides a better measure of the distribution of welfare than is provided by income and wealth, which have thus far held centre stage when the levels and trends of inequality are being considered. First we show that there is a wide variation among countries and regions in their inequality of well-being, and in the extent to which these inequalities changed from 2005-2011 to 2012-2015. In the world as a whole, in eight of the 10 global regions, and in more than half of the countries surveyed there was a significant increase in the inequality of happiness. By contrast, no global

region, and fewer than one in 10 countries, showed significant reductions in happiness inequality over that period.

Second, the chapter shows that people do care about the happiness of others, and how it is distributed. Beyond the six factors already discussed, new research suggests that people are significantly happier living in societies where there is less inequality of happiness.

Chapter 3: Promoting Secular Ethics (Richard Layard)

This chapter argues that the world needs an ethical system that is both convincing and inspiring. To supplement what is seen as a global decline in the impact of religious ethics, the chapter offers the principle of the greatest happiness as one that can inspire and unite people from all backgrounds and cultures, and that is also in harmony with major religious traditions. But to sustain people in living good lives, more than a principle is needed. Living organisations are needed, including those already provided by many religions, in which people meet regularly for uplift and mutual support. To create secular organisations of this type in addition to religious institutions is an important opportunity to promote well-being in the 21st century. The movement known as Action for Happiness is used as an example to show both the need for and the power of collaborative action to design and deliver better lives.

Chapter 4: Happiness and Sustainable Development: Concepts and Evidence (Jeffrey Sachs)

The year 2015 was a watershed for humanity, with the adoption of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by heads of state at a special summit at the United Nations in September 2015, on the 70th anniversary of the UN.

Sustainable development is a holistic approach to well-being that calls on societies to pursue economic, social, and environmental objectives

in an integrated manner. When countries single-mindedly pursue individual objectives, such as economic development to the neglect of social and environmental objectives, the results can be highly adverse for human well-being, even dangerous for survival. Many countries in recent years have achieved economic growth at the cost of sharply rising inequality, entrenched social exclusion, and grave damage to the natural environment. The SDGs are designed to help countries to achieve a more balanced approach, thereby leading to higher levels of well-being for the present and future generations.

This chapter shows that measures of sustainable development, including a new Sustainable Development Index prepared by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network, help to account for cross-country variations in happiness, along the lines suggested by the analysis in Chapter 2 of this Report. In particular the SDG Index helps to account for cross-national patterns of happiness even after controlling for GDP per capita and unemployment. A measure of Economic Freedom, as proposed by libertarians, shows no such explanatory weight. The evidence suggests that indeed all three dimensions of sustainable development—economic, social, and environmental—are needed to account for the cross-country variation in happiness.

The UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network has urged the inclusion of indicators of Subjective Well-being to help guide and measure the progress towards the SDGs. To this end, a letter from thirty global experts in well-being research—plus national and global statisticians with experience in collecting and using these data—has been sent to the UN Secretary General, and to the committees responsible for monitoring the SDGs.

The 2016 Special Rome Edition (Edited by Jeffrey Sachs, Leonardo Becchetti and Anthony Annett)

As we have noted above, *World Happiness Report 2016—Special Rome Edition*, separately selected and edited, was prepared for the March 2016 launch event in Rome. The papers all have strong Roman links: the paper by Anthony Annett links Catholic social teaching with the work of other philosophers of well-being, while the other four papers are by Italian researchers dealing with a variety of issues in the analysis of well-being. We are immensely grateful to our Roman hosts for creating the launch event, and for contributing a variety of interesting papers. We provide below a brief description of each paper, and of its possible implications for the future development of global happiness research.

Chapter 1: Inside the Life Satisfaction Blackbox (Leonardo Becchetti, Luisa Corrado and Paola Sama)

The authors propose the use of a package of domain measures of the quality of life to supplement or perhaps even replace the overall life evaluations central to the *World Happiness Report*. They find that their package measure is more fully explained by a typical set of individual-level variables, and prefer it for that reason. They recommend, as do we, the collection of a broader range of variables that measure or arguably support various aspects of well-being. Only thus can the science of well-being be broadened and strengthened. However, to measure overall happiness, we continue to attach more validity to peoples' own judgments of the quality of their lives than to any index we might construct out of possible component measures.

Chapter 2: Human Flourishing, the Common Good, and Catholic Social Teaching (Anthony Annett)

This paper makes three claims. First, human beings are by their nature oriented toward broader notions of happiness that are intimately tied to the common good. Second, with the turn toward the individual, post-Enlightenment political and economic developments have stripped the common good of all substantive content. Third, by restoring the centrality of the common good, Catholic social teaching offers a coherent and internally consistent framework for human flourishing that applies principles to particular circumstances in a way that does not depend on agreeing with the confessional claims of the Catholic Church.

Chapter 3: The Challenges of Public Happiness: An Historical-Methodological Reconstruction (Luigino Bruni and Stefano Zemagni)

The central idea of this paper, drawn from Aristotle, is that there is an intrinsic value in relational and civil life, without which human life does not fully flourish. They contrast this broader conception of a good life, for which they see roots in the Italian civil economy, with what they see as narrower and more hedonistic approaches. The central role they ascribe to the social context—what they refer to as relational goods—has echoes in the empirical findings in the *World Happiness Report*, where the quality of social support and the excellence of civil institutions are of primary importance, supplemented now by an apparent preference for equality of happiness.

Chapter 4: The Geography of Parenthood and Well-Being: Do Children Make Us Happy, Where, and Why? (Luca Stanca)

The author digs deeper into a frequent finding that having children does not add to the happiness of their parents. The paper confirms a negative relationship between parenthood and life satisfaction that is stronger for females than males, and turns positive only for older age groups and for widowers. Looking across the world, a negative relationship between parenthood and life satisfaction is found in two-thirds of the countries studied. The negative effect of parenthood on life satisfaction is found to be significantly stronger in countries with higher GDP per capita or higher unemployment rates.

Chapter 5: Multidimensional Well-Being in Contemporary Europe: Analysis of the Use of a Self-Organizing Map Applied to SHARE Data (Mario Lucchini, Luca Crivelli and Sara della Bella)

The authors use a network-based mechanical data-reduction process to look for common and divergent features of 38 different well-being indicators collected from the same survey of older European adults that provided the data for the paper by Becchetti et al. They find that the measures of positive emotions tend to cluster together, as do the measures of negative emotions. Overall life evaluations show a more umbrella-like character, with somewhat more kinship to the positive emotions. This seems to be consistent with the *World Happiness Report 2016 Update* finding that positive and negative affect have quite different apparent impacts of life evaluations, being strongly positive for positive affect but only very slightly negative for negative affect.

Conclusion

In light of the limited time since the last report, the 2016 Update is shorter than usual. This year, as detailed in Chapter 2 of the Update, we provide a fuller accounting of the distribution of happiness among people within each country and region. Just as happiness provides a broader measure of well-being than separate accountings of income, health status, and the quality of the social context, we find that inequality of well-being provides a broader measure of inequality than measures focusing on the distribution of income and wealth. After documenting a general rise in the inequality of happiness, we present preliminary evidence that countries with more equal distributions of well-being have higher average life evaluations. This in turn invites broader discussions about the policies that might improve the levels and distribution of well-being within and among countries.

We also present in Chapter 4 some preliminary evidence that sustainable development is conducive to happiness. We find that happiness is higher in countries closer to realizing the Sustainable Development Goals, as approved by the nations of the world in September 2015.

To supplement our short *World Happiness Report 2016 Update*, and to fuel the discussions at the three-day series of launch events in Rome, we have also issued the companion Volume 2—the *World Happiness Report 2016 Special Rome Edition*. This separately-edited volume comprises more technical papers, mainly prepared by our Roman hosts.

We are also in the midst of planning the next full report, the *World Happiness Report 2017*, which will include special chapters on happiness in Africa and in China, as well as analyses of happiness in the workplace and over the course of life. We also plan to extend our analysis of the inequality of happiness, and to dig deeper into the happiness consequences of international migration.

The cause of happiness as a primary goal for public policy continues to make good progress. So far, four national governments—Bhutan, Ecuador, United Arab Emirates and Venezuela—have appointed ministers of happiness responsible for coordinating their national efforts. There are many more sub-national governments—from large states like Jalisco in Mexico to many cities and communities around the world—that are now committed to designing policies enabling people to live happier lives. Experimentation is easier at the sub-national level, and this is where we expect to find the most progress. These local efforts are often supported by more encompassing organizations—such as the Happiness Research Institute based in Copenhagen and the Action for Happiness in the United Kingdom—designed to foster and transmit locally-inspired and delivered innovations.

In these interconnected ways, we see increasing evidence that the emerging science of well-being is combining with growing policy interest at all levels of government to enable people to live sustainably happier lives. Our data show what needs to be done to improve the level and distribution of happiness. We are encouraged that progress can and will be made.