



Forward on Project +

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This symposium on Felicitators contains the first collective output of an interdisciplinary group of wellbeing researchers invited to contribute and combine their efforts to synthesize and expand what can usefully be learned from the rapidly enlarging science of wellbeing. The two main goals of Project +, as the collective effort has been named, are:

- 1) To produce a synthesis of what is known about the ways one can or cannot achieve human fulfillment, personal wellbeing and happiness, and
- 2) To investigate the consequences of these findings at the collective level of countries or societies, including those at very different stages of material development.

Project + researchers were invited to consider the following questions, amongst others:

- How do recent discoveries and methodologies help answer very old and traditional questions relating to the “good life”?
- What are the paths to personal wellbeing, life satisfaction, contentment or happiness?
- Which paths are counterproductive?
- What are the conflicting forces in place, or contradictions, the “dark points”?
- What do we need more of? Less of?
- Are current approaches delivering the expected progress for civilization?
- Can sustainable paths to personal happiness be generalized to the societal level?
- How can one balance the outside/in and the inside/out approach?
- How might paths to personal happiness affect public policies?
- How can we redefine “progress” and the goals of economic development?
- How can we release the energies of altruism and generosity (rather than selfishness and carelessness)?
- Could a clarified path towards wellbeing and happiness be the “missing link,” or the motivation, to challenge our contemporary way of life and allow a paradigm shift that might lead to a better world?

Answers to these questions could provide a new framework for how decisions are made on many different levels – individual, collective, organizational, institutional and governmental. It would enable a person wishing to live a ‘good life’ to have a more precise idea of how to achieve it as well as enable policy makers, in education, health, government, and businesses, to make decisions that facilitate personal and social wellbeing instead of relying exclusively on a narrower range of objectives, often defined in purely material terms.

The project reflects the perspectives of several different disciplines, and is based on dialogues among scientists who otherwise may not have the opportunity to work closely together. Multiple disciplines’ perspectives on happiness are represented, including



contemplative studies, religious studies, psychology, sociology, anthropology, economics, ecology, history, philosophy, and neuroscience.

The aim of the project is to use dialogues among experts to facilitate breakthroughs in how we think about happiness and what we have traditionally believed leads to happiness. Whereas these topics are often studied by isolated individuals, each working from a single perspective, Project + is unique in its emphasis on creating small-group collaborations for the purpose of generating new ideas about happiness. Too often the individuals who conduct basic science and/or who publish in philosophical or scientific journals do not share their knowledge across disciplinary boundaries, or with the general public, leaving to others the task of reaching practical conclusions and communicating them to a lay audience. An important aspect of Project + is its goal to share accessible, applicable models of happiness that protect the planet's resources.

These are complex and controversial topics, but bringing in the best of contemporary science and multi-disciplinary methodology offers an extraordinary opportunity to address some of the current challenges facing modern societies.

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