Foolish Measures of Happiness

> *The main problem, though, as I said, is that the insights of poets and taletellers and historians and philosophers from the beginning into what human man happiness actually is have simply been bypassed. "Happiness" viewed as self-reported mood is surely not the purpose of a fully human life. If you were given a drug like Aldous Huxley's imagined soma, you would report a happiness of 3 to the researcher every time. Something is screwy. Ask yourself: self: if you could experience a wonderful life in half an hour hitched up to a super-duper machine (as the philosopher Robert Nozick put it), but then died, would you take the offer? Not unless you were about to die anyway. You have a life and an identity of your own, which you cherish, regardless of "happiness." The point is made by numerous modern philosophers-Mark Chekola (2007), for example, as earlier by Nozick and David Schmidtz- and by other philosophers and theologians and poets back to Confucius, Lord Krishna, and before.14 If we economists are not going to get any deeper than the dubious pot-of-pleasure theory of happiness, perhaps we ought to stick with what we can in fact know scientifically-namely, national income properly measured, as "potential" or what I call "scope" or what Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum call "capabilities"- the ability to read, for example, ample, or the potential to become the founder of a new business, or a cultivated talent as an artist.*

Deirdre N. McCloskey. Bourgeois Dignity: Why Economics Can't Explain the Modern World (Kindle Locations 983-985). Kindle Edition.