

Happiness

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Like the [Labour Party](#) I have major problems with the government's pursuit of a 'happiness' agenda.

I have long felt 'happiness' a vacuous goal. That's because, like making money, happiness is an epiphenomena that is the consequence of the achievement of some other goal: it can never be the goal in itself.

So, in [The Courageous State](#) I define the goal of human endeavour as being the achievement of a person's potential. Potential in this sense simply means what a person is capable of doing. It sounds simple, but around the world billions of people are denied the chance to do just that every day. No wonder they're not happy.

What they do instead is adapt to a circumstance in which they're forced to accept a sub-standard opportunity for achievement.

It's my fear that the supposedly clinical methods used to assist the achievement of happiness, whether CBT ([cognitive behavioural therapy](#)) or [positive psychology](#), are not seen as ways of providing opportunities to assist people achieve but are instead ways of conditioning people to accept the sub-optimal reality they're being presented with daily. The promoters of these methods may be honourable: the political use of these ideas may not be.

In that case these psychologies offer no cure for the anger people are quite reasonably feeling. That anger is rational, deep seated and justified. Answers will only come when its causes are addressed. Teaching people to be 'happy' will not do that. It's just a variant on pill popping. Treating the symptoms and not the causes of malaise in our society will not work.

It's time people had the opportunities they deserve, and which our current market system is denying them.