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On the need to Balance Critique with Appreciation

Recognizing and anticipating that there is already a very strong emphasis on problem-orientation among the contributions to these discussions, I would like to argue here that the NDP takes an *appreciative* rather than catastrophist-declinist approach to recent global development patterns. We may have good reasons to argue for a new paradigm or paradigms, but we would be foolish and ungrateful to pretend that global development trends over the past two centuries have been in general bad. The challenge for the future is not just to undo current harms, but sustain the manifold benefits of the modern development era.

First, in addition to its insistence on cumulative skeptical enquiry, one of the most compelling and influential ideas of the European Enlightenment (which also echoed ancient ethical doctrines from other parts of the world) was that of putting human happiness at the centre of development ethics. Though endlessly debatable, this idea moves moral and practical debates in positive directions by insisting that each individual's subjective experiences and evaluations of their own lives must be taken into account by decision-makers, policy-makers, and evaluators. It is an unsettling idea because it has radical potential in the face of any kind of fundamentalist belief or authoritarian doctrine – including 'economism', 'environmentalism', 'fascism', and 'religious fundamentalism'.

The happiness criterion forces us to question the value of 'economic growth' and material wealth, but also to celebrate their benefits. It also requires us to justify our promotion of sustainable environmental care not just on doctrinal grounds but also on eudaimonic grounds. It requires us to challenge any doctrine or system which uses ancient texts, or powerful positions, or unverified beliefs as its justification. And it reminds us to build our wellbeing not merely on 'external' goods, nor solely on 'internal' psychological strengths, but on *interactions between our minds and the world we inhabit*.

Second, any engineers of a would-be 'new development paradigm' are duty bound to recognize not only the flaws but also the strengths of any paradigms they are trying to replace or modify. In this regard, it would be perfidious to deny that the world has in the past 200-300 years seen not only the massive expansion and extension of human life, but also unprecedented improvements in the quality of human life and experiences. It is a matter for celebration, not dismay, that we have so many more people alive today than ever before.

Most of humanity lives longer and with vastly more security (freedom from violence, disease, and oppression), options and capabilities than most of their ancestors could have dreamed of. Responsible developers must therefore show not only sympathy and solidarity with the less fortunate masses who aren't benefiting as much as they might from modern development opportunities, but also *appreciative empathy* with the many billions who live fulfilling, happy lives that have been facilitated by the Enlightenment and the associated global expansion of knowledge, love, peace, democracy, and functionality.

References on global moral and practical progress:

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Helliwell, John, Richard Layard, and Jeffrey Sachs (eds). 2012. *World Happiness Report*. Columbia University: Earth Institute

Kenny, Charles. 2011. *Getting Better: Why Global Development Is Succeeding-And How We Can Improve the World*. New York: Basic Books

Pinker, Stephen. 2011. *The Better Angels of Our Nature*. New York: Viking
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Also, as requested, a short selection of relevant publications by this author:

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Thin, Neil. 2002. *Social Progress and Sustainable Development*. London: ITDG Publications