

*The European Culture
for Human Rights
The Right to Happiness*

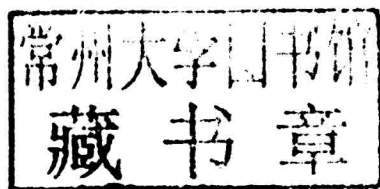
Edited by

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The European Culture for Human Rights: The Right to Happiness

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P U B L I S H I N G

The European Culture for Human Rights: The Right to Happiness
Edited by Elena Zamfir and Filomena Maggino

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A FOREWORD INSTEAD OF AN INTRODUCTION

It is difficult to explain my enthusiasm and my renewed state of professional satisfaction as a psycho sociologist when I first heard from my colleague (Corina Dumitrescu, Rector of Dimitrie Cantemir Bucharest University, professor in law but also a very close friend of sociology) the proposal of the agenda of the international conference on the Right to Happiness and the Quality of Life. Perhaps this very difficulty justifies why I felt drawn to the theme of my presentation, together with many other social psychologists and theoreticians. Perhaps, among other things, my interest in the subject was a consequence of the unexpected revival of intense theoretical debates around an explicit focus on the right to happiness in times such as ours, being overly dominated by the political agenda and futile, populist discourse/debates about the economic crisis without hope for the near future, the social reform without impacting well-being, the cost-benefit analyses that tend to overlook the social and the individual, or by half-hearted and only marginally efficient attempts at social policies of inclusion.

I started with a rhetorical question: “Why do we talk about happiness again; why do we return to the traditions of ancient social philosophy?” I myself am inclined to revisit the topic of happiness not because I disagree with recent theoretical analyses or because I am dissatisfied with what was recently published about happiness, and not because there are a lack of arguments and theoretical constructions of new models of self-actualisation or self-fulfilment as basic components of happiness, but because the topic of happiness has been and will always remain a constant preoccupation of human beings, characterised by new meanings and new highlights, depending on how it is situated in time. Happiness, as a subjective state of mind or subjective well-being, as a complex interplay of cognitions and positive emotions, is deeply rooted in people’s awareness of their relationship with their environment.

This book materialized after an International Conference focusing on the relation between the right to happiness and the quality of life. The coordinators have been gathered from the papers presented in the conference and classified according to their topic in an attempt to group them into sections and, as much as possible, to put them into the time frame. The papers included within the volume suggest distinct, multi- and

inter-disciplinary perspectives in analysing happiness and quality of life. Hence, **the coordinators are not responsible for any possible error or inexactitude that may occur in the papers contributed by the different authors, who remain solely responsible for the quality of their communications.**

These papers highlight the multiple approaches in the analysis of happiness and the quality of life in the modern terms of individual and collective welfare, while introducing instruments used to measure life satisfaction, welfare indicators and mechanisms which decrease or remove altogether the barriers that hinder the quality of life for individuals. Briefly, the bottom line of the book is that the right to happiness, stipulated into the Constitution, is worth fighting for.

I want to mention our acknowledgements for prof. univ. Corina Dumitrescu, the initiator of this international Conference with such special issues as the right to happiness, for Graham Clarke, our proofreader who provided constant professional guidance in improving the English version of this book, Keith Thaxton, our typesetter for her patient in the technical text arrangement, and last but not least for Carol Koulikourdi who encourage the preparation of this book in its English format by providing good advice for finalizing our manuscript.

Coordinators
Elena Zamfir and Filomena Magino

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PART I

HAPPINESS AND LIFE QUALITY: TRENDS AND DEFINITIONS

CHAPTER ONE

REVISITING HAPPINESS AND THE QUALITY OF LIFE: NEW AND OLD SOLUTIONS

ELENA ZAMFIR¹

Abstract

This chapter identifies a close association between the concepts of happiness and quality of life. It shows that a profound perspective of conceptualising happiness is based on multi- and interdisciplinary contributions from philosophy, ethics, sciences, religion, and even politics. However, attempts to define happiness have proven tortuous and tricky, because it is almost impossible to capture the complexity of the theoretical implications of the concept. Ancient philosophy used rational and speculative language/discourse to formulate the main theoretical difficulties generated by the act of thinking about the essence of human beings—their happiness and freedom—engendering many debates around defining these constructs. What these attempts have in common is the pervasive understanding of happiness as a dynamic process and never as a structured, finite state. The person as an open system is in a continuous process of defining and perfecting himself/herself, and of self-growth, self-development and self-construction. Human beings are capable of transformations that prolong the lines of their existence from the real into the possible and from the possible into the real. This is why human achievements that are due to the pursuit of happiness differ from reaching a closed and well-defined state, whose characteristics were clearly planned for in its development. On the contrary, the person's definition is related to her/his complex bio-psycho-socio-cultural environment, which ensures

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her/his complex development and the evolution of her/his ability to continually self-construct.

Keywords: happiness-definitions, quality of life, subjective well-being, perceived quality of life, self-actualisation, hierarchy of needs, life satisfaction, subjective indicators.

1. Defining happiness: A framework

Starting with ancient philosophy and ending with the latest contribution of psycho-social sciences aimed at devising practical strategies for individual well-being, happiness has been identified as a process of permanent pursuit of authenticity and responsible actions leading to one's improvement and development, and to self-actualisation. Happiness seems to be one of the central themes of philosophical meditation, but also a permanent goal of people's practical life strategies [1]. Formulating its concerns coincided with the birth act of philosophical reflection and it has continued to be reflected in theoretical and scientific disputes. The entire ancient philosophy that referred to itself as wisdom gravitated around this understanding of happiness as the main meaning of life of human beings [2] [3] [4].

The concept of happiness has often been characterised as slippery, treacherous, deceptive and difficult to identify precisely from a theoretical point of view, and difficult to capture in all the complexity of its cognitions and emotions. However, perhaps the most difficult thing is to measure the life satisfactions or the components of happiness. People have also emphasised how happiness as a desideratum is difficult to reach. The pursuit of happiness can be compared to a *Fata Morgana*—the closer to it we think we are, the further away it is actually getting [1].

This is why happiness appears to have two different hypostases: as an ideal to pursue and to reach, but also as an ideal to define. Happiness imposes itself as an aspiration. This state of happiness opens a new opportunity for “learned optimism” [5], with a special meaning for the future actions of human beings. The pursuit of happiness requires first defining happiness and specifying its basic components, and then identifying the favourable circumstances and the ways in which it can be pursued as a process of personal self-fulfilment in time. Practical approaches of happiness were formulated by applied social psychology, applied sciences (“Humanistic Psychology”) and especially by “Positive psychology.” Martin E. P. Seligman proposes the fundamental principles of the new movement of Positive Psychology for reaching “authentic

happiness" [5]. Knowledge as a way of truth-seeking uncovers the fascinating topic of happiness and the ways it can be reached. "The Science of Well-Being" [6a] is an important and recent example, wherein Ed Diener made a good synthesis on scientific contributions focused on surveys measuring happiness, taking into account the subjective and objective indicators of well-being and the main classical theories [6a] [6b] [6c]. In analysing happiness he points out three dimensions of the theories: "The first dimension is whether the theory places the locus of happiness in external conditions such as income and status, as many sociological theories do, or within the attitudes and temperament of the individual, as many psychological theories do. Throughout my writings there is a mix of both the internal and external factors that influence well-being. A second dimension that characterizes scholarship on well-being is the issue of whether the factors affecting well-being are relative or absolute ... A third and related issue is the degree to which the influences on happiness are inborn and universal or are learned, based on the goals and values of the culture and of individuals" [6a, p.3].

In its nascent form, the entire social and humanistic thematic of modernity can be traced back to ancient wisdom, whose goal was attaining happiness. Ludwig Grunberg (1978), after the epicurean model of happiness from ancient philosophy, proposed a simple definition of happiness as the means between wishes had and wishes granted [7]. This was to be widely examined and disputed from the perspective of modern sciences. In this formula, the numerator is always going to be higher than the denominator, because humans will always have new desires and new goals. The human beings open to self-improvement will never feel completely comfortable or completely satisfied. Common sense suggests that individuals are never satisfied with what they are, with what they have, and with what they have accomplished. The finality of their aspirations/desires for complete self-fulfilment or self-development cannot be stopped. In antiquity, clarifying the idea of happiness stayed in the realm of philosophical theory and was never converted into the type of practical means that can change one's life. This idea was also the epicentre of the crisis of ancient philosophy.

What these attempts have in common is the pervasive understanding of happiness as a dynamic process and never as a structured, finite state. The person as an open system is in a continuous process of defining and perfecting himself, and of self-growth, self-development and self-construction. Human beings are capable of transformations that prolong the lines of their existence from the real into the possible, and from the possible into the real. This is why human achievements that are due to the

pursuit of happiness differ from reaching a closed and well-defined state, whose characteristics were clearly planned for in its development [1]. On the contrary, the person's definition is related to her/his complex bio-psycho-socio-cultural environment, which ensures her/his complex development and the evolution of her/his ability to continually self-construct.

Starting with ancient philosophy and ending with the latest contribution of social sciences aimed at devising practical strategies for individual well-being, happiness has been identified as a process of permanent pursuit of authenticity and responsible actions leading to the one's improvement and development, and to self-actualisation. Happiness seems to be one of the central themes of philosophical meditation, but also a permanent goal of people's practical strategies. Formulating its concerns coincided with the birth act of philosophical reflection and it has continued to be reflected in theoretical and scientific disputes.

Centuries later, it began to be reconceptualised using the instruments of modern sciences. This is why the legendary French revolutionary Louis Antoine de Saint-Just exclaimed that "Happiness is a new idea in Europe" [8]. However, modern philosophy, obsessed by knowledge and by the idea of truth-seeking through science, initially neglected the notions of happiness, goodness and freedom.

The birth of social sciences opened the possibility of some theoretical demarcations centred on people's day-to-day life satisfaction, approaching the issue of happiness directly and in a new light. The collaboration of scientific theories led to a new domain of multi- and inter-disciplinary analysis more similar to the daily concerns of the individual, to the meaning of life as **a theme centred on the quality of life**. Life satisfaction, its different degrees of accomplishment, and the accumulation of essential concrete life aspects under its different spheres, led to a shorter definition of happiness [1]:

- a) self-actualisation through the precise definition of one's daily needs and requirements that have to be accomplished in order to feel fulfilled (conventionally proposed as a positive definition) [5] [9] [10]; and
- b) what one should stay away from in order to avoid insecurity, unease, distress, daily risks or any other destructive force with a negative impact on one's physical or psychological balance (a negative definition) [11] [12].

Thus, happiness appears to be ambivalent. On the one hand, it is characterised by a desire towards balance, inner peace, harmony and

cooperation, perceiving optimism in the future; on the other hand, it is also characterised by a permanent search to overcome one's limitations through self-improvement, pursuit of life satisfaction, and the expectation to succeed. This complex of actions, openly aimed at the pursuit of happiness, is the end result of various stages of achievements and the gradual accrual of competences in relation to one's environment.

2. The relation between happiness and quality of life

The introduction of the concept of quality of life opened new opportunities for understanding and especially for measuring happiness. The quality of life, as a first stage of theory and social action, as an active practice for keeping the harmony/balance between humans and their environment, was introduced to public attention in relation to a shocking event that took place in 1967 when an oil rig was damaged close to the French coast, following which a wave of oil spilled over the beaches, sending the unlucky vacationers home. It might have been a simple accident reflecting the negative effects of modern industrial developments, with their disagreeable aspect that lacks environmental consciousness [1]. It was, however, also a symbolic event which prompted people to question how feasible it is to build an entire civilisation on industrial miracles, with no concern for human lives or the environment. That year, possibly responding to that particular event, Western Press launched a new concept, Quality Of Life, that was to become extremely popular in increasingly different social contexts. It spread rapidly from journalists to academics, politicians and social scientists (sociologists, social psychologist, etc.), becoming a key concept of our times [1]. It is interesting to note that it also spread geographically across different countries as well as across different political and social systems. It was adopted by communist as well as capitalist countries, and developing countries as well as economically developed ones. Interestingly, it became the common element and the liaison of different theoretical approaches in social sciences, economics and politics, defying the ideological barriers of the time. The concern for the quality of life, for the life satisfaction and well-being of the individual, rapidly became one of the hot topics of research and science.

Quality of life is more than just a label for rethinking happiness from a practical point of view [13]. The new concern for quality of life expresses a modern uneasiness in a world characterised by increased risks, and the individual's new search for balance at the intersection between social, economic, political and environmental factors. This uneasiness suggests firm criteria for balancing the requests of the person with those of nature,

especially when it comes to using nature's limited resources consciously and responsibly. Thus, we are witnessing a re-evaluation of the topic of happiness from the point of view of sciences, based on the pragmatic concerns of collective modernity. For instance, Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett show the negative impact of modern economic growth on well-being and happiness, and on life-expectancy and the health state quality, presenting much evidence for a wise economic growth based on equality for everyone: "The scale of income differences has a powerful effect on how we relate to each other. Rather than blaming parents, religion, values, education or the penal system, we will show that the scale of inequality provides a powerful policy lever on the psychological well-being of all of us ... Economic growth, for so long the great engine of progress, has, in the rich countries, largely finished its work. Not only have measures of well-being and happiness ceased to rise with economic growth but, as affluent societies have grown richer, there have been long-term rises in rates of anxiety, depression and numerous other social problems. The population of rich countries have got to the end of a long historical journey" [14, pp.5-6].

The theoreticians and analysts began to consider the conditions created by cutting edge technology in the context of a civilisation in the course of globalisation and analysed the perverse effects of "unhealthy" technology and their implicit, indirect effects on human life. The pragmatic solutions proposed by Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett for our modern societal risks could appear strange to some at the time of writing, during a period of economic crisis. In fact, they return to the same conclusions of the 1970s to 1980s scenarios about green technologies of world development. However, from my point of view, they are thinking in a rational way when they mention that the sustainability and increasing quality of life since the Brandt Report in 1980 underline that: "social and environmental sustainability go together. It is fortunate that just when the human species discovers that the environment cannot absorb further increases in emissions, we also learn that further economic growth in the developed world no longer improves health, happiness or measures of well-being. On top of that, we have now seen that there are ways of improving the quality of life in rich countries without further economic growth" [14, pp.218-219].

Sociologists, psychologists and statisticians began to create new mechanisms for social indicators and a specific battery of instruments that measure the quality of life. Both objective and subjective indicators were created to measure people's satisfaction within different domains of their lives. Afterwards, many theoretical studies, empirical studies and surveys