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HAPPINESS AND THE SAD TOPICS OF ANTHROPOLOGY

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May 2005

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SUMMARY

This paper proposes a new set of engagements between anthropology and other disciplines towards the interpretation, empirical research, and promotion of happiness. It argues that the cross-cultural study of happiness (concepts, aspirations, approaches and achievements) is deeply embedded in the traditions from which social anthropology arose, but that happiness as an explicit topic has been dramatically silenced in anthropology. Key reasons for that silencing are: **relativist/adaptivist** bias (anti-evaluative, or naïvely/ romantically positive representation of non-western culture); **pathological/ clinical** bias (focusing on suffering, ill-being, and adverse emotions); **cognitivist/social constructionist** bias (ignoring or sneering at evolutionary psychology, rejecting the role of emotions and experiences in social analysis); **anti-utilitarian/anti-hedonistic** (rejecting utilitarian motives and explanations, focusing on means not ends, doubting the moral value of pleasure). After reviewing some anthropological writing on happiness, I set out a provisional agenda for more explicit empirical cross-cultural qualitative research and analysis of happiness particularly with a view to offsetting current weaknesses in psychologists' and economists' happiness research, which tends to be ethnocentric, measurement-obsessed, and - most paradoxically - pathological. There are promising potential markets for happiness anthropology as a source of empirical information and theoretical guidance for social policy, evaluation studies, psychological therapy and, for the vast numbers of mass market, self-help publications.

Key Words:
happiness; anthropology; well-being; evaluation; pathologism; mental health; relativism; cognitivism; utilitarianism

Key reading: Desjarlais Robert, Eisenberg Leon, Good Byron, Kleinman Arthur [eds], (1995); Diener, E. and E.M. Suh, Eds (2000); Grinde, Bjørn, (2002); Hollan, Douglas W. and Jane C. Wellenkamp, (1994); Howell, Signe [ed], (1997); Veenhoven, Ruut, World Database of Happiness (ongoing).

INTRODUCTION

Among the many thousands of texts on happiness, there are lots that claim some degree of basis in anthropology or advocate further study of happiness in diverse cultural contexts. Social anthropology is defined on a general-interest web site as being 'about what people do… How they try to pursue happiness and enjoy themselves' (Non-Trivial Creations, 2001). Yet the bizarre situation is that happiness - a set of concepts central to the understanding and pursuit of good lives everywhere - is barely mentioned in most social anthropology courses and texts.

There must, you'd expect, be a rich anthropological literature on a subject as important as happiness. Perhaps there is but, if so, it is in hiding. If, contrary to appearances, happiness is a major focus and purpose of social anthropology, it is astonishing how under-theorised and inexplicit it is. Anthropologists aren't known for being bashful about the scale and the range of topics they address. We write books and teach courses on big topics like globalisation, nationalism, power and economics, as well as on much more diverse and specific topics such as shopping, sport, flowers, and basketry. Why on earth, then, are anthropologists so reluctant to address happiness and associated themes such as well-being and the quality and purpose of life?

This article proposes the following arguments:

i. The cross-cultural study of happiness (concepts, aspirations, approaches, and achievements) is deeply embedded in the traditions from which social anthropology arose.
ii. But happiness as an explicit topic has been dramatically silenced in anthropology, due to:
- **relativist/adaptivist** bias (anti-evaluative, or naïvely/romantically positive representation of non-western culture);
- **pathological/clinical/abnormality** bias (focusing on suffering, ill-being, abnormalities, and adverse emotions);
- **cognitivist/social constructionist** bias (ignoring or sneering at evolutionary psychology, rejecting the role of emotions and experiences in social analysis);
- **anti-utilitarian/anti-hedonistic** (focusing on means not ends; doubting the moral value of pleasure).

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iii. That more explicit empirical cross-cultural qualitative research and analysis of happiness is much needed as a source of inspiration for social policy and practice and as an antidote to the dominant strands of research on happiness and well-being which tend to be ethnocentric, measurement-obsessed and - most paradoxically - pathological.

iv. There are promising potential markets for happiness anthropology as a source of empirical information and theoretical guidance for social policy, evaluation studies, psychological therapy and for the vast numbers of mass market self-help publications.

The first point above, concerning the status of 'happiness' as a core theme and purpose in anthropology, needs to be set in the broader context of anthropology's concern with morality - with what it means to be good, to live a good life and to organize social processes and institutions that facilitate or inhibit virtue and well-being. Happiness must be a central part of discussions of morality and human flourishing. In diverse contexts, it is conceived, valued, pursued, and deployed in moral discourse and in the evaluation of experience, action and identity. It is a matter for cross-cultural research to learn more about how important happiness is, and in what ways happiness matters, in relation to other components of human flourishing such as virtue, creativity, social justice and the physical well-being of bodies and environments.

If there were an annual prize for the most significant anthropological contribution to the understanding of happiness or well-being, it is hard to think of academic anthropologists who could be short-listed. If the judges were academic anthropologists themselves no doubt they would be able to find enough links between academic research and happiness to make an award each year: a human rights anthropologist might win it one year, a specialist in mental illness the next and someone studying the emotions or the anthropology of play or festivity might win it the following year. But a more open-minded panel would almost certainly fill the shortlist with people other than academic anthropologists: some professional anthropologists working in development, welfare and health might be candidates, but probably the list would fill up with psychologists, social psychologists and philosophers.

If you agree with the above assessment you will probably also agree that such a situation is baffling. Happiness is obviously one of the more important concepts by which we evaluate our lives and make our personal and collective choices. Since happiness analysis is closely intertwined with the analysis of human flourishing, needs, nature, personhood and social progress, it is hard to

imagine a topic more suited to anthropological analysis and ethnographic enrichment. And the contemporary silencing of happiness is all the more surprising given our discipline's evolution from earlier philosophical interests in human nature, in the possibilities of progress and in the comparative happiness of 'primitive' and 'modern' societies.

Far from being just a minor intellectual puzzle, this situation is seriously worrying for those who care about anthropology as a discipline and particularly for those who would like anthropology to remain relevant to real-world concerns and influential in policy and practice. Mention happiness studies to anthropologists and they will probably raise an eyebrow in an intrigued but also in a kind of light-hearted way. Many will also giggle. But the anthropological silence on happiness is neither trivial nor funny.

In most, perhaps all, cultures happiness is almost uniquely important as an organising concept via which we make our decisions and evaluate ourselves and our friends. In the West at least, it is prominent in most media. Thousands of novels and self-help books are primarily about happiness and its disappointments, TV soap dramas and programmes about travel, sport, clothing and psychology routinely involve discussions about various dimensions of happiness, adverts promise happiness to would-be consumers, music hints at happiness and often explicitly sings about it.

Throughout the heydays of the Enlightenment, and for at least a century onwards, happiness was one of the most prominent themes of political and social scholarship. So what happened to this theme? For the past hundred years there is so spectacularly little written explicitly about happiness in anthropology, and in social studies more generally, that we must assume that there have been powerful forces which have been silencing this topic.

A SHORT HISTORY OF HAPPINESS IN SOCIAL ANALYSIS

In the 1866 edition of the *Popular Magazine of Anthropology* the purpose of anthropology was said to be to 'assist all races of man to material prosperity and happiness' (Reining, 1962). The idea that anthropology was about the promotion of happiness was consistent with the early development of all the social sciences. All the key Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment thinkers focused much of their analysis and rhetoric on happiness - its nature, its importance for policy and whether or not it was possible or likely that modernity could usher in more happiness.

Rousseau, arguably the strongest influence on the early development of anthropology, argued that civilization had ushered in a loss of authentic happiness. Locke, Comte, Condorcet, Montesquieu, Spencer, Marx, Weber and Durkheim were all very strongly and explicitly interested in the contributions of social and philosophical analysis to the understanding of happiness and conversely in the relevance of concepts such as happiness and utility to social analysis and social policy. Adam Smith and Malthus both affirmed that happiness is the ultimate human goal, although the replacement of happiness with wealth soon earned the discipline of economics the title of the 'dismal science'. By the start of the 20th century Alfred Marshall was to declare that Economics was no longer directly concerned with well-being but rather with material goods.

Happiness is particularly prominent in the work of Durkheim, cropping up repeatedly in all of his key texts such as *Division of Labour* (1893), *Rules of the Sociological Method* (1896) and *Suicide* (1897). The Psychological traditions are also steeped in happiness theory until the silencing of happiness crept in: Wundt, Freud and William James all wrote extensively on the meaning of happiness and its role in social life. It is most prominent in the work of William James whose *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902) is almost obsessively focused on happiness - as the ultimate good; as a personality trait of religious entrepreneurs and, hence, as the source of religious faith and as a moral objective for programmes of mental self-control. Arguably, he also dampened enthusiasm for happiness research by casting doubt on theological grounds for happiness and by de-linking it from the idea of the rational, purposeful life (Mumford Jones, 1953). Be that as it may, it wasn't until the 1960s that even a tiny minority of psychologists began to follow his advice and focus on positive emotion and its manipulability.

The 20th Century was the dark ages for most social sciences as far as happiness is concerned. Such happiness research as did persist was largely dominated by philosophers, theologians, moral crusaders, self-improvement gurus and more recently by psychologists and economists. Major recent research compendia on happiness, even those specifically on cross-cultural perspectives, are authored almost entirely by psychologists (see eg: Diener and Suh, 2000, whose 19 authors are all psychologists). Anthropologists (along with sociologists) are conspicuously silent on the subject. Reference books and introductory texts on anthropology (including even key textbooks on psychological anthropology such as Schwartz et al, 1992; Bock, 1988; Segall

et al, 1999; Harré and Parrott, 1996) typically have no entries on happiness. Much the same is true of introductory texts on sociology, social policy, and political studies. Rapport and Overing's (2000) collection of 'Key Concepts' in anthropology includes, among the sixty concepts selected for mini-essays, none on well-being, happiness, human flourishing, emotion or quality of life, whereas other concepts they evidently see as more important to anthropology include: 'écriture feminine', 'the un-homely' and 'non-places'.

The excellent Anthropological Index Online, covering hundreds of thousands of articles from 1957 to 2004, has ten times more entries for 'suffering' (165) as for 'happiness' (15) and 22 times as many for 'illness' (339). There are 2,715 articles on 'health' but most of these are mainly about illness and its treatments. Interestingly, 'violence' gets nearly four times as many references (1,110) as 'peace' (281). To judge from this same database, explicit happiness research output by anthropologists has been far outstripped by research on such topics as hair (592), baskets (320), masks (600), tattooing (67), flowers (62) and alcohol (245- ah, maybe that's where the happiness research is to be found). Without doubting the interest and importance of texts about hair, baskets and masks, it does make me queasy to note that they outnumber anthropological texts on happiness by 100 to one.

For another very rough indication, a 'Google' search on 'anthropology of happiness' (2.09.04) gets 33 hits and 'sociology of happiness' gets only 27; whereas 'economics of happiness' gets 1,360 hits, 'psychology of happiness' gets 3,780 and 'philosophy of happiness' gets 1,280. Comparisons with other anthropological topics are similarly striking: 'anthropology of religion' gets 15,000 hits, 'anthropology of gender' gets 3,610, 'anthropology of development' gets 2,730. Among the 2,500 book titles on 'happiness' offered by Amazon, the overwhelming majority are self-improvement guides which have pitifully little reference to any kind of happiness research at all, let alone to anthropology.

Veenhoven's introduction to the World Database of Happiness (1997) notes that research findings on happiness are very scattered and, for the most part, bibliographically irretrievable. Although arguing that social science research promises a breakthrough after many centuries of non-empirical philosophising and arguing in principle for cross-cultural comparative studies of the factors influencing happiness, this introduction has no reference to anthropology other than one fleeting analogy between the World Database of Happiness and the Human Areas Relations Files.

THE SILENCING OF HAPPINESS: SOME EXPLANATIONS

The muteness of academic anthropology on happiness is surprising, since many of us took up anthropology as part of a personal quest for happiness, with varying degrees of explicit rejection of the conventional routes to happiness into which we had been schooled. In many cases, if we are honest with ourselves, we were called to anthropology at least in part by an imagined noble savage who was also a happy savage and one who was going to teach us alternative routes to happiness (although in non-western countries many of us would learn about quite different life-goals such as *nirvana* and the idea of the primacy of collective rather than personal well-being). A plausible first assumption might be that happiness is just too vague and abstract for anthropologists. But this in itself can't be a satisfactory explanation, since anthropologists aren't generally afraid of addressing big topics. If we can produce thousands of papers and classes devoted to abstractions such as power, alterity, hegemony, identity and culture, why have we produced virtually none on happiness? Anthropologists have been reasonably explicit in asking questions like 'what is a human being?' and 'what does it mean to be a person in culture x?' but they have been conspicuously silent on questions like 'what is a happy human being' or 'what does it mean to be a happy person in culture x?'

This silencing of happiness needs to be acknowledged and interpreted with a view to resisting it. Happiness is of key significance in the ordering of society. It is subject to social influence and so it should be a core focus of social science. Aside from this moral imperative, such a striking and bizarre feature of the history of social science is also worth analysing for what it reveals about the evolution of social science. The silencing of happiness reveals at least four general qualities of social sciences that have become dominant over the past century. Social science has been *non-evaluative, pathological, anti-psychologistic* (and specifically *anti-emotional)* and *anti-utilitarian* (focused on means rather than ends, perhaps due to an anti-hedonistic suspicion of the moral status of pleasure as goal guiding individual and collective choices and, hence, rejection of the policy-relevance of utilitarianism and the study of happiness). Other features of social science which are also plausibly linked to the silencing of happiness, but which I won't explore here, are its *anti-evolutionism* (hence inability and unwillingness to interpret the ways in which evolution has influenced our dispositions and hence our social choices and

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patterns) and its elitist isolation from commonsense everyday concerns (specifically relevant here is the 'we-know-best' approach that assumes popular everyday interest in happiness to be irrelevant to the interpretation of morality).

Moral relativism, adaptivism, and non-evaluation

In *Anthropology by Comparison,* Fox and Gingrich remind us of the sense of public responsibility which anthropologists felt in the 1920s and 1930s, part of which was to offer cultural comparisons which would be in the public interest. Since then, and particularly in the last two decades of the twentieth century, they argue, we have been neglecting cross-cultural comparison (2002: 1-3). A great deal of social writing has been *non-evaluative:* overwhelmingly, social science writing has been describing situations and analysing patterns without coming to explicit judgements about the good or bad quality of human experience. In anthropology and in cross-cultural or multicultural studies, the influence of the doctrine of relativism has been instrumental in forbidding or deterring cross-cultural comparative moral judgements. Relativism resulted for many years in a pervasive Panglossian optimism in anthropology, favouring an assumption that whatever we label as cultural or traditional, especially if it is non-Western, must be benign and worth cherishing.

In a book that already seems curiously dated, Robert Edgerton argued in *Sick Societies* (1992) that anthropology remains largely non-evaluative due to the continued pernicious influences of both cultural relativism and adaptivism. The book seems dated because so much of it is taken up criticising texts and arguments which most anthropologists have long ceased to respect. It is hardly novel or timely to expose Turnbull's caricatures of the Mbuti and the Ik, or Belo's romanticism about the Balinese, or Malinowski's functionalism, or Sahlins's irresponsible fantasies about primitive happiness and social justice in pre-modern societies. In any case, the problem with these authors was that they *did* take an evaluative approach but one which was naïve, biased and not informed by any plausible theory of well-being.

Still, there is a sense in which this hard-hitting book was needed: it is hard to deny that academic anthropology is still guided by an essentially negative code regarding evaluative judgement - that cultural traits and practices are mainly to be described and analysed but not judged in ethical terms since they must be assumed to make sense in terms of their cultural and biophysical contexts.

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There are of course good reasons for the assumption in terms of avoiding jumping too hastily to adverse and perhaps ethnocentric judgements. But what this assumption lacks is a concept of human *flourishing;* instead it is guided merely by a non-evaluative criterion of human existence. To the extent that we describe and analyse in non-evaluative terms, we are nowadays a surprisingly 'cold' discipline, despite our evolution from the 'hot' - emotional, tendentious, romantic attitudes of so many of our intellectual forbears.

Ironically, given relativism's link with explicit deterrents against evaluation, this also brought an implicit positive evaluative strain into the social sciences: it is arguable that Panglossian optimism in anthropology took hold as a rebound from the pathological critique of Western modernity and that in the late 20th century pathologism has infected anthropology as an over-reaction to that earlier romantic relativism. As Colin Turnbull proved when he wrote the obsessively pathological *Mountain People* (1972) as a contrast to the romantic *Forest People* (1962), it is even possible for an individual author to over-react against his own romanticism. Likewise in Robert Edgerton's *Sick Societies* (1992), a catalogue of social ills, he admits that he includes his own earlier writing as part of the romantic relativism that he is responding to.

The lack of happiness anthropology is part of a broader pattern, affirmed in publications by Howell (1997) and Laidlaw (2001), namely the lack of explicit ethnographies and anthropological theorising on morality. Laidlaw has argued, reasonably, that 'there cannot be a developed and sustained anthropology of ethics without there being also an ethnographic and theoretical interest - hitherto largely absent from anthropology - in freedom' (2001: 311). Pursuing this argument, however, it is perhaps more important still to argue that *there cannot be an anthropology of ethics or of freedom without developing an anthropology of the ultimate goods which we might be free to choose.* Whether or not our philosophy puts happiness at the apex of all goods, it surely must feature in some form among our pantheon of ultimate goods. If there are other ultimate goods worth considering, we must consider their relationships with happiness, ie: scrutinise the complementarities and trade-offs among the various ultimate goods which we value. It is worrying for the discipline to have professional codes of 'ethics' (eg: ASA 1999; AAA 1998) which pontificate on the good behaviour of anthropologists, and on their responsibilities towards the well-being of the people they study and of humanity in general, with no reference to any theories or empirical studies of well-being or happiness.

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Clinical pathologism in the social sciences

If you can excuse a pun on grounds of instructional interest, we can start by adapting a famous Bourdieu quote: 'What goes *unsaid* goes without saying'. Unhappiness doesn't go without saying, but unsadness does. You can be unhappy but not unsad, unwell but not unill, unloved but not unhated, unhopeful but not unpessimistic. The general rule in English is that you can only transform a word into its opposite with a tag if the word refers to something normally taken for granted. You can be discontent, displeased or dissatisfied, because these are all marked departures from assumed norms. Most though not all adverse emotions are seen as abnormal: you can't be unangry or undepressed because you can't exceptionalise an already exceptional condition. Fear must have some degree of normality, since you can be 'unafraid' in situations where fear is the expected emotion. Exceptionally positive emotions such as joy and elation are untaggable: you can't be unjoyful or unelated. The reason for this linguistic digression is to assert that *happiness in part goes unexamined because normality doesn't in general attract the attention of social science.* Happiness is a default, unmarked category of experience. It is taken for granted and conditions or experiences that depart from this norm are those that attract our attention and are 'marked' categories of condition and experience.

The default status of goods may dispose the media to dwell on bads, but doesn't stop us from discussing happiness in everyday life. So why has it for the past century prevented the social sciences from taking well-being and happiness seriously? The muteness of the social sciences on happiness is part of the general pathologism of the social sciences - a characteristic I have discussed at length elsewhere (Thin, 2002). Edgerton's *Sick Societies* (1992) exemplifies this. It is of course intentionally and rhetorically pathological, as an antidote to the surfeit of relativist and adaptivist ethnography. This is a key text in the evaluative anthropology of well-being, a collection of evidence of maladaptiveness and of anthropological denial of this. It is, however, disappointing in that the focus on ill-being is overdone, undermining the credibility and impact of this otherwise superb book. Edgerton fails to consider what an 'adaptive' or 'well' culture might look like in theory and offers no examples of good social institutions that promote well-being.

Social scientists in general have been focusing on adverse experiences and evaluating the quality of life and the quality of institutions and relationships in negative terms. So, although many social scientists have studied emotions

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and have written normatively about experience and about aspirations, they have written predominantly about sadness and suffering. And when they have written about the distributions of desired goods they have focused much more on injustice than on all the work which every society does to achieve justice. Just how serious this pathological influence is can be judged from the fact that many texts about morality, most texts about the emotions and even most texts purportedly about well-being or quality of life, forget to mention happiness. I hope I am not alone in finding this an astonishing and undesirable state of affairs for the social sciences.

My growing interest in the cross-cultural study of happiness is a logical progression from my 20 years as a development anthropologist. After all, what is intentional development if not about progress towards a world in which access to ultimate goods is increasingly optimised? But I too have been tempted into pathologism since I have spent most of that time engaging with the philosophical and practical challenges of development; with minimal attention to whether and how the various kinds of change called 'development' actually contribute to happiness. My efforts like most social development specialists have been focused mainly on poverty, suffering and harm and on strategies for reducing these. Eldis, one of the more reliable search engines on international development, finds only nine references to happiness in its 24,507 records. By comparison "suffering" scored 365 hits, "violence" 514, "poverty" 3,986. "Well-being" scores 686 hits, but a quick glance through these shows that most of them are primarily about ill-being (which itself scores only 37 hits). "Mental health" scores 99, "mental illness" 25 (the overall "health:illness" ratio on this database is 5,487:215.

Pathological strategies can of course be seen as positive, following Karl Popper's dictum of 'negative utilitarianism' namely that the business of politics is to ensure avoidance of unnecessary suffering, not to promote happiness, and Charles Murray's (1988) argument that the freedom to pursue happiness requires limited governance. But to emphasise only the reduction of poverty and reduction of human rights abuses is both philosophically unsound (since even a minimal goods approach still needs to be informed by a theory of ultimate goods) and questionable on pragmatic grounds (since there are lots of logical and practical contradictions in trying to target the poor and reduce suffering without trying, more generally, to promote collective efforts for social progress). In international development planning and analysis, there have been frequent calls for a 'rights-based approach' and many agencies claim to be implementing this as a new alternative to old-style 'needs-based'

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approaches. The gist of the argument is that promotion of 'rights' is less paternalistic than the charitable provisioning of goods to meet needs. The needs-based and rights-based approaches should never have been seen as alternatives but rather as complementary components in any sound development strategy. Between them, though, they share the property of defensiveness and negative minimalism which arguably should be complemented by a third, 'happiness-based' approach.

Pathological bias can turn us away from analysing happiness even when researchers claim to be focusing on it. In what is arguably social anthropology's most prominent attempt to provide cross-cultural comparisons and policy guidance on happiness, the huge report on *World Mental Health* (Desjarlais, et al, 1996) dismally failed to live up to the promise of its title. The book is about mental illness, not about mental health. The key conceptual weakness with this book is that it takes for granted that we know and agree on what 'mental health' is. The authors plainly forgot their own advice, given on page 7, that 'mental health is not simply the absence of detectable mental disease but a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can work productively and fruitfully and is able to contribute to her or his community.' Happiness is implicitly assumed to exist in the absence of the various problems they discuss and the work of promoting mental health is implctly assumed to be the work of preventing, alleviating and curing mental illness.
This is of course not a lone example. If you come across an academic or a policy text with the word 'well-being' (or 'welfare') in the title, there's a fair bet that it will actually be about ill-being and will have little or nothing to say about well-being. Similarly 'mental health' texts are mainly about mental illness and not about mental health. Stray a little further from the happiness theme and you'll find books on 'human rights' that are entirely about wrongs and books about 'development' that are actually about poverty and destruction. Such counter-intuitive language usages have become entirely normalised so that we rarely even notice them.

A recent compendium entitled *Child Well-being, Child Poverty and Child Policy in Modern Nations* (Vleminckx and Smeeding, 2001) is commended on the cover by Gosta Esping-Andersen, the global archdeacon of social policy, as 'by far the best available' book on this subject. Its 22 chapters do indeed provide an excellent overview of mainly survey-based evidence on the ill-being of children living in poverty. Only two of the 22 titles refer to 'well-being' and in neither of those does the text actually focus substantially on well-being. The

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index has just three references to 'well-being' but roughly 100 references to 'poverty'. The indicators discussed are overwhelmingly pathological: 'health' assessed by looking at mortality and disease, 'well-being' assessed by looking at anxiety, disobedience and unwanted teenage pregnancy.

Apart from the usual social policy bias towards Europe and North America (no attempt is made to live up to the inclusive 'Modern Nations' promise in the title), this collection tells us virtually nothing about the well-being of children living in poverty, let alone about the well-being of children in general. In other words, it compounds four kinds of bias which plague social policy research and enormously reduce its validity and usefulness: there are the two forms of pathological bias (focusing on people categorised as 'poor' and then looking at indicators of ill-being to the detriment of any analysis of well-being) and there are two further biases which are the familiar biases that anthropology sets out to avoid, namely the western bias (it is unforgivable to say your book is about 'modern nations' then cover only Europe and North America!) and the over-reliance on surveys and consequent lack of qualitative analysis.

Another striking and similar example is a major recent book on children's 'well-being' in the UK (Bradshaw, 2002) which has incredibly little to say about well-being in its 422 pages and is particularly inadequate in its treatment of happiness or 'emotional well-being' as it calls it. It has two very happy-looking 'Traveller' girls on the front cover. The choice of this photograph points to the book's focus on disadvantaged categories of children (most of the text is not about children in general despite its claim to this effect on page one). The smiles on these girls' faces tally with the 'well-being' of the title, implying the objective of ensuring the happiness of all children include those who have hitherto lived in poverty or who have been socially excluded. But despite its title the book has virtually no discussion of happiness, nor any substantial analysis of what 'well-being' means to children or adults and most of its chapters are on pathologies such as mortality, injury, suicide, crime and drug abuse. For comparison's sake, but saving the detail for later, Edgar and Russell's *The Anthropology of Welfare* (1998) is similar in its focus on pathologies and inattention to happiness and in its emphasis on numbers and services rather than on experience and evaluation of the quality of life.

The Bradshaw report also exemplifies a different kind of bias which social anthropology is certainly not guilty of but which is true of much social policy work and applied research on well-being: the *quantification* bias. The introductory chapter has no analysis of 'well-being' but consists mainly of statistical tables and graphs telling us about demography, income poverty,

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school performance, employment and disability - lots of measurables, but virtually nothing about well-being, the purported subject of the book. I can think of no clearer demonstration of a gap in the market which anthropologists ought to be filling.

Quite a different, but similarly striking case of perverse book titling is the otherwise excellent ethnography *Contentment and Suffering: Culture and Experience in Toraja.* Yes, reading the title backwards, it is about Toraja, and is rightly regarded as a classic in the anthropology of experience. And it has a lot to say about culture and suffering. But what happened to 'contentment'? This is a very striking example of a text that sets out to study well-being but ends up mainly talking about suffering. The word 'contentment' appears perhaps two or three times in the text, is not used in any chapter or section headings and is not in the index (nor are related terms such as 'happiness' or 'satisfaction' used in titles or index). By contrast, 'suffering' occurs scores of times in the text and is the sub-title for the second half of the book. Actually they explicitly say on page 27 that part two is on 'discontent and suffering', following the emotionally neutral introduction to culture and identity issues in part one. The table of contents makes clear the real emphasis of the book, which is not on contentment at all (no references to positive emotions) but on adverse emotions and processes such as anxiety, vulnerability, anger, conflict, sadness, shame, embarrassment, grief, crying, being upset, wailing, deceit, disturbing dreams, somatic complaints, suicide, mental disturbances, depression, disorder and dysphoria. The authors offer no explanation for this contradiction between title and content and it is hard to see where 'contentment' comes from because even the glossary has no term for it, whereas it contains numerous terms for adverse emotions.

Hollan and Wellenkamp (1994:28) say that the pathological emphasis comes from their Toraja informants:

> *"for many villagers, happiness and contentment can best be defined as the occasional and fleeting absence of suffering and hardship"* .

They do not 'talk much about the ways of attaining happiness. Mostly, they talk of how to avoid distress' (1990:118). Moreover, since the informants for this book are mainly adults, this itself constitutes a bias towards discussion of suffering, since they see adulthood as a time of suffering in contrast to a happier childhood (1990:80-83). Indeed, it is possible that an important source of pathological bias in anthropology could derive from the tendency for trans-

cultural ethnographies (where the researchers are working in an unfamiliar culture and are struggling with the language) to be based mainly or solely on talking to adults. The Toraja pattern of serious adults saying they are living unhappy adulthoods which contrast with their happy childhoods has a familiar ring to it. One of the few other ethnographies purporting to be on a happiness-related theme is Naomi Adelson's *Being Alive Well: Health and the Politics of Cree Well-Being* (2001), which was, she admits, almost entirely based on discussions with adult informants. Their holistic version of 'well-being' is told mainly in negative terms via a narrative of external incursions which have robbed them of their traditional way of life. It is quite likely that younger informants, eager users of the technologies and consumer goods of modern Canada, might have had utterly different stories to tell about their conceptions of well-being.

Social constructionist and cognitivist and biases

To put it bluntly, the relative inattention to emotional experience in ethnography, at least until the 1980s, is so striking that it is almost as if anthropologists had been writing about a neutron-bombed world, one with the bare skeleton of infrastructure left intact but the human meaning taken out. The social infrastructure of kinship arrangements, political structures and ritual observances was described in painstaking detail. The meanings of these institutions was interpreted, but in the 'dry' way you might interpret an Egyptian hieroglyphic, with all the attention to symbolic patterning and minimal attention to the ways in which diverse individuals might experience the institutions. Nowhere is this clearer than in Rodney Needham's structuralist manifesto against psychologism: *Structure and Sentiment.* This opens by declaring that anthropological research means 'making sense of particular things done by human beings in society' but goes on quickly to declare that 'sense' means looking at 'structure' and not at 'sentiment' since psychological interpretations of kinship systems are 'demonstrably wrong' (1962:vii-viii). Here is not the place to explore the respective overall merits of structuralist versus psychological explanations of kinship, but the simple point is that no kind of account of kinship - whether it is descriptive, analytical or normative – can reasonably be proposed without reference to the ways in which people emotionally experience kinship systems.

The anti-psychological bias of the social sciences is most clearly illustrated in the institutional arrangements of academia, which somewhat absurdly tend to

put Psychology departments in separate parts from social science. Yet it is fairly obvious that Psychology can't be an effective or realistic science without being a social science and that social science can't be effective or realistic without being psychological. British Social Anthropology courses and texts seem particularly prone still to a social constructionist bias, as revealed by their lack of reference to psychology texts in general. Particularly invidious is the lack of any substantial engagement with the growing field of evolutionary psychology, an area of studies which has produced some of the most promising recent texts on happiness and morality (see eg: Grinde, 2003; Charlton, 2000; Cosmides and Tooby, 1997; Wright, 1995).

Insofar as social scientists have avoided the anti-psychologistic trap, they have tended to fall foul of the *cognitivist* trap: when they do pay attention to psychology they have tended to pay far more attention to mapping out mental structures, patterns and representations than to feelings or dispositions. There have been far more texts on topics like rationality and cognitive processing than on happiness, love or hope. And again, insofar as social scientists have avoided both the anti-psychological and cognitivist trap, when they have come to study emotional dimensions of social life most have fallen foul of the pathological bias and have studied depression, anxiety, hate and anger far more than the positive emotions. To put it more bluntly, social anthropologists until very recently proceeded as if following this kind of advice:

- If you can, write about society as if the psychology of individual mind had nothing to do with it, as if it were all about relations, structures, networks and not about motives and feelings.
- If you insist on exploring psychology, make sure you keep clear of emotions; stick with cognition – mental maps, language, symbolic patterning.
- If you must discuss emotions, stick with collective representations of these – rituals, language and so on and steer clear of embodiment and experience.
- If you end up, despite all the above advice, in the muddy waters of emotional experience, you're probably not a social anthropologist any longer, but we'll let you stay on if you promise to dwell on the adverse emotions – anger, hate, suffering, depression, fear, shame and embarrassment; give love, aspiration, joy, and satisfaction a wide birth.

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Part of the problem is a general reluctance of social scientists to address emotional dimensions of social life. But when, as they inevitably must, emotions find their way into social analysis, it looks as though every effort is made to restrict discussion to the cognitive, formally articulated, collective and public versions of these and to steer clear of what might be deemed speculation about private feelings. Denzin's book *On Understanding Emotion* (1984) opens by arguing that even the literature on the emotions fails to address the *lived experience* of emotions: 'People are their emotions. To understand who a person is, it is necessary to understand emotion.' So the crucial research question is, 'how is emotion, as a form of consciousness, lived, experienced, articulated, and felt?' (1984: vii, 1). Such questions are addressed in Arnold Epstein's important (1992) critique of cognitivism and constructivism in anthropology. Though arguing in general for more attention to the emotions (noting the lack of such attention even in psychological anthropology), in practice Epstein is mainly interested in adverse emotions. The index has multiple references to anger, grief, anxiety, shame, repression, weeping and envy and no references to happiness or related terms such as pleasure or joy.

Anti-utilitarian and anti-hedonistic biases

Part of the story about the silencing of happiness lies in confusion between happiness and selfish pleasure-seeking and, consequently, an association of happiness research with reductionism, frivolity and even immorality. When David Plath first proposed research on enjoyment in Japan, he found colleagues reluctant to see enjoyment as a subject for serious discussion. He said people responded with the same kind of nervous reaction which greeted anthropological studies of sexuality. Many anthropologists were said to have 'regarded the project as preposterously amusing' (Plath, 1964:8, reviewed by Norbeck, 1965: 535).
Such anti-hedonism is related to, but not of course the same as, anti-utilitarianism; just as pleasure is part of but not the same as happiness. Malinowski's *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922) sets out from early on to persuade readers that one of the great merits of anthropology is - it isn't utilitarian. He apparently associates utilitarianism with a view that the meaning of life and the purpose of social institutions is primarily about satisfaction of basic material needs. Frazer's Preface commends Malinowski's anti-utilitarianism very explicitly: Malinowski's (1922:x) interpretation of *kula* exchange, he says, 'shows that it is not based on a simple calculation of utility,

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of profit and loss, but that it satisfies emotional and aesthetic needs of a 'higher' order than the mere gratification of animal wants'. Malinowski boasts an anti-utilitarian interpretation not only of exchange but also of the purpose of 'work', which he says includes 'aesthetic' rather than just 'utilitarian' motives (1922:58). He doesn't specify exactly which 'utilitarian' authors he thinks he is correcting. Certainly, neither Bentham nor J S Mill ever proposed any kind of over-emphasis on material gratifications and J S Mill went to great lengths in *Utilitarianism* (1863) to explain why it was absurd to suggest that utilitarians made humans look no different from animals in terms of their pleasures and purposes.

It is more than a little ironic that Malinowski should have claimed to be anti-utilitarian. As Elvin Hatch (1997:373) has recently pointed out, Malinowski's own functionalist theory 'assumed a universal standard of good' and 'rested on…a version of utilitarian theory whereby the practical benefits of institutions served as a standard for making judgments'. Yet Malinowski's ill-informed critique lived on in 20th century anthropology. Evans-Pritchard emphasised that Nuer totemism wasn't driven by 'utilitarian' motives (1956: 80). Sahlins pointed out on the first page of his *Use and Abuse of Biology* (1977:3) that Malinowski's functionalist approach has itself been accused of over-emphasising the role of biological need satisfaction in shaping culture. Sahlins (whose book was incidentally somewhat insincerely titled since it was only about the abuse of biology), criticised socio-biology as a 'new variety of sociological utilitarianism' (1977:x) and said that it had a lot in common with Malinowski's functionalism. But Sahlins, like Malinowksi, seems to misrepresent what utilitarianism is. An emphasis on biology and an under-emphasis on culture is not a good reason to call a theory 'utilitarian'.

No doubt Malinowski picked up some of his anti-utilitarian spirit from Durkheim, who passionately criticised utilitarian assumptions about self-interest being the main driving force behind social institutions. His main argument in favour of establishing social science was to promote appreciation of the ways in which social solidarities rather than individual preferences (as economists would have it) shape our society. This is no doubt a much fairer criticism of utilitarianism than the idea that it was a naively materialistic creed. More recently, the human rights movement and those social scientists and philosophers who have developed theories of social justice, have added to this a further critique emphasising the moral danger of Bentham's (but not J S Mill's) naive views on aggregate and measurable happiness might lead to policies which favoured expedient use of socially unjust means to achieve the

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ends of 'maximum happiness'. Many other plausible critiques of general and specific problems with variants of utilitarianism have been offered. Yet whatever the reasons for social scientists' doubts about utilitarianism, none of them justifies a wholesale rejection of the idea at the core of utilitarian philosophy, namely that 'happiness', broadly and flexibly conceived, does and should form a central guiding principle for governance and for personal choices and for our interpretation of moralities.

In the 20th century, the cold-shouldering of utilitarianism and antagonism towards it took on the character of an unseemly inter-institutional squabble of economists versus the rest, with much of the antagonism informed more by professional jealousy and boundary maintenance than by any rational or emotional objections to the core of utilitarian theory. In addition, since happiness is in many cultures, including Western culture, treated as a default category (as discussed briefly in the following section), the idea of happiness as an individual and/or collective achievement has perhaps not gained the foothold that it ought to have in the minds of researchers and policy-makers.

THE MEANING OF HAPPINESS: UNIVERSALS AND VARIETY

So what should anthropologists and other social scientists be looking at under the 'happiness' rubric? The English term 'happiness' has of course diverse referents and nuances, including various emotional states (anticipatory feelings as well as satisfaction and relief, for example), goals and metaphysical ideas of luck or goodness. For the purposes of sketching out the main reasons why we might want to organise some of our research under a 'happiness' rubric, it is helpful to begin with three broad senses of happiness - *motive, evaluation* and *emotion* - related respectively to the *meaning* or *purpose* of life, to the *cognitive assessment* of the quality of life and to the *experience* of life:

- *motive:* happiness is a life-goal or incentive for action and hence is a concept through which people organise their ambitions, plans and their understanding of the meaning or purpose of human life in general;
- *evaluation:* happiness is central to our evaluation of our own quality of life and that of others and hence is central to cultural values and moral theories even if sometimes only implicitly so;
- *emotion:* happiness refers both to temporary pleasures (ie: the brain's reward system) and to enduring mental states of subjective well-being and so is conceptually central to the experience of diverse emotions.

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By researching happiness as a motive we can learn about how happiness beliefs influence behaviour and shape our analysis of behaviour. Note the relevance here of Jefferson's careful wording in the U S *Declaration of Independence:* whereas 'life' and 'liberty' are 'rights', it is not happiness itself which is a right but the '*pursuit* of happiness'. By discussing the meaning and status of happiness as a life goal, we can learn a great deal about how individuals and larger social entities rationalise and explain their cultures, structures and political choices. We can learn about how human nature and society are conceived and about how these concepts influence (or fail to influence) personal careers and development strategies.

By researching the 'emotion' aspect we can learn about how the mental states of happiness or unhappiness affect behaviour. We can also learn about how personal experience is shaped by cultural concepts and we can understand better how internal feelings influence behaviour and vice versa.

Happiness is in most languages an unmarked category and therefore in some sense a default condition or core concept from which others are derived. Like health, we take happiness too much for granted. Much of our individual life effort and certainly the majority of our social policies, are directed not towards the generation of happiness but rather the avoidance or mitigation of various forms of suffering. These facts and the problems they pose for a would-be anthropology of happiness, are well expressed by Parkin's introductory essay to *The Anthropology of Evil (1958:8):*

> The only problem with starting with a search for a people's ideas of what makes them happy is that, normally, such notions are unmarked. The existences of most people (let us further assume) are of contentment recognized as happiness, if at all, after the event. It is the periods of suffering that are culturally marked and are experienced by the ethnographer as they occur and as they are identified and, hopefully, resolved by the participants. Such suffering is further marked by being linked either to ideas of evil or, say, to just retribution.

Ironically, given its logical association with aspiration and the purpose of life, happiness can also be associated with the absence of purpose. In German and English, for example, it is etymologically connected with luck as opposed to purpose - as in the phrases 'happy-go-lucky' and 'happy turn of events'.

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Happiness is most commonly conceived as a property of individuals and specifically of their moods although it may also be extended to their life experiences, life-cycle phases or to their characters in general. It is also applied to collectivities (happy families, happy cultures or even countries), places (happy house, happy valley), times (happy hour, happy birthday, happy New Year) and cultural products (kinds of music, stories, art works).

A reasonable working hypothesis would be that there are some basic concepts and meanings of happiness which are universally shared, even-though they may be challenged by some sceptical or countercultural philosophies:

- All cultures have concepts of subjective well-being which are strongly linked with individual and collective aspiration and purpose.
- All moral codes endorse the idea that in principle it is good to try to contribute to other people's happiness (at least provided that they deserve this).

But known cultural and individual variables are also very striking and probably worth exploring and analysing more fully than has been done so far:

- *Overall status of happiness as a life purpose:* Even if all individuals' cultures value happiness, we vary immensely in the degree to which we accept it as the supreme good or the core life purpose. In some philosophies, happiness is defined as just one among several life purposes - ranking alongside rather than above others such as virtue, religious merit, and knowledge.
- *Deferment or continuous enjoyment:* Insofar as we do aspire to happiness as the key objective of life, we vary greatly in the degree of *deferment* which we accept. For some, imminent happiness is the key objective, the idea being that we ought to try to achieve happiness daily throughout our lives. Others put much more emphasis on working, suffering and deferring pleasures now in order to achieve happiness later in life or even in an afterlife or in an imagined future life.
- *Altruism:* We vary greatly in the degree to which we perceive our happiness as dependent on other peoples' happiness, or our contributions to others' happiness.
- *Means:* Our views on the various means for achieving happiness are highly varied and we further vary in our ability or willingness to imagine and respect other people's and other cultures' alternative routes to happiness.

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- *Display:* Individuals and cultures vary in their attitudes or principles concerning the display of happiness and sadness. For some, appearing happy even in adversity is a guiding moral principle on the understanding that showing sadness amounts to loss of face or to a selfish distribution of something undesirable. For others, displaying happiness may be disapproved, perhaps because of an underlying belief that happiness as a limited good. Or both happiness and sadness may be regarded as emotions that must not be overtly or grossly displayed.

HAPPINESS IN 20TH-CENTURY ANTHROPOLOGY
'Lost Eden' ethnographies

With the possible exception of 'nature:nurture' debates, there is no arena of popular and academic debate more pervasive and enduring than questions about the qualities that may or may not have been lost through the relentless march of civilization. Many of the most famous anthropological texts belong to a genre variously known as 'lost Eden' or 'salvage' ethnography. Even when describing situations where culture seems to have supported extremely high levels of violence and consequent insecurity, ethnographers have still managed to convey a sense of sadness at the prospects of these ways of life succumbing to social change. In its 1992 edition, in response to mounting public criticisms, Chagnon changed his title from *Yanamamö: The Fierce People* to *Yanamamö: The Last Days of Eden.* This is an interesting choice of term; since Chagnon's gleeful cataloguing of grotesque levels of violence is somewhat at odds with the Biblical Eden. Jean Liedloff, author of *The Continuum Concept: In Search of Happiness Lost,* according to the cover of the book, spent 2.5 years 'deep in the South American jungle living with stone age Indians' and that, on the basis of what she learned there, is now in California advocating psychotherapy to help us recover our 'natural well-being'. Texts whose ethos is not dissimilar to that one have no doubt inspired and encouraged the typically large numbers of students taking anthropology as optional extra classes in Europe and North America. Anthropology students' searches towards alternative happinesses have for many years been propelled and reinforced by reading Rousseau-esque accounts of happiness among marginal peoples. Typically, such accounts ignore all the objective indicators of suffering such as horrific rates of infant and maternal mortality, malnutrition, physical violence, and homicide.

The evolutionary psychologist Bruce Charlton (2000) puts the Lost Eden assumption forcefully:

> The Golden Age for humans - such as it was - was the life of a nomadic hunter gatherer. Evidence for this statement is scanty, but what evidence there is…is consistent and unambiguous. This was the time when more of the people were happier for more of the time than at any other point in human history.

Such explicit and bold comparative statements are extremely rare in anthropology given the dominance of relativism. Grinde (2003:250), another anthropologist/evolutionary psychologist, is slightly more circumspect and accepts both that contemporary 'tribal' peoples are in very different environments to those we evolved in, and that modern civilization brings many comforts. But he still comes to a lost-Eden conclusion: 'I believe the lack of a tribal social setting to be the most significant Discord between present life and that of the environment our genes are adapted to' …'it may prove to be an Achilles heel for the human species'.

Malinowski's (1922:xv) first words in *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* refer to a sadness at the heart of anthropology:

> Ethnology is in the *sadly* ludicrous, not to say *tragic*, position that at the very moment when it begins to put its workshop in order …the material of its study melts away with *hopeless* rapidity.' (Emphasis added.)

It is hard to imagine a less auspicious way to start the founding text of social anthropology. The implication here is that the world is becoming a sadder place with the 'melting away' of some kinds of culture and that anthropology in particular has every reason to be a sad discipline. But by the end of the first chapter of *Argonauts,* Malinowski was urging his readers to take an interest in happiness, if only as chroniclers of the ways in which people in 'melting' cultures used to achieve happiness:

> the goal [of ethnography] …is, briefly, to grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realise *his* vision of *his* world …what concerns him most intimately, that is the hold which life has on him. In each culture, the values are slightly different; people aspire after different aims, follow different impulses, yearn after a different form of happiness. …To study the institutions, customs and codes or to study the behaviour and

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mentality without the subjective desire of feeling by what these people live, of realising the substance of their happiness …is …to miss the greatest reward which we can hope to obtain from the study of man. (Malinowski 1922: 25)

The discipline which Malinowski founded then was admittedly sad but must include the study of hope and happiness as core themes. The pity is that this acknowledgement never developed into anything approaching a theory of motivation or of value. Although emphatically trying to set up an alternative interpretive approach to mainstream 'utilitarian' economics, *Argonauts* fails to deliver on its implicit promises of an alternative route to studying well-being or happiness.

To take a well-known example, Malinowski's discussion of 'work' (1922: 58-60) emphasises the aesthetic values of gardening, dispelling two myths - first, he rejected the idea 'that the native is a happy-go-lucky, lazy child of nature' (since they work hard and in culturally elaborate ways). Second, noting that much gardening effort is directed at 'aesthetic purposes' and is in some ways an end it itself, he attacked the utilitarian myth of 'Primitive Economic Man' whose 'rationalistic conception of self-interest' was seen as the sole motivation for work. But he then proceeds to assure us that although gardening magic 'imposes on the tribe a good deal of extra work …in the long run, however, there is no doubt that by its influence in ordering, systematising and regulating work, magic is economically invaluable for the natives' (1922: 60). Without a theory of 'value' and a workable definition of 'economic', this kind of evaluative statement is not just naively optimistic but also vacuous. If the 'value' of aesthetics is defined broadly and vaguely, then of course any activity can be described as 'economically invaluable'. But this doesn't tell the reader much about the qualities being described. Does he mean that without magic, the Trobrianders would produce less food, work less efficiently, enjoy their work less or enjoy less the fruits of their labours? We are left to guess about these matters.

We are also left guessing about the larger question of whether Malinowski's apparent Panglossianism has ruled out any possibility of some other cultural institutions performing better than garden magic at producing whatever 'values' he may be talking about. When he says later that Kula valuables 'are of no practical use' (1922: 86) it is fairly clear that he means they aren't *directly* used as tools. If the valuables contribute to health through their symbolic role in healing rituals, or to happiness through the pleasure of temporary ownership or

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the fun of the exchanges, they do so *indirectly* as part of a collective and long-term pattern of social exchange and meaning-making. Discussion of their 'economic value' (1922:90) is much more problematic, as this evaluative term depends on discussion of what people (including ethnographers and their readers as well as the people being discussed) value and why.
Malinowski was clearly trying to establish a moral anthropology, a holistic anthropology of values, emotions and motives. Yet he offered no systematic 'grammar of motives' (to borrow Edmund Burke's elegant phrase) and no theory or definition of the 'values' which he so confidently said he could assess.   Malinowski's critique of economics, his holistic approach to motivation and, above all, his desire to promote *evidence-based* and *evaluative* approaches, cross-cultural comparison would have benefited enormously from a systematic approach to the analysis of motives and values. Happiness should surely have featured centrally in such theorising. But it is touched on only in passing references and is never allowed to become a rubric for analysis.

Lévi-Strauss's title *Tristes Tropiques* doubtless echoes, at least unconsciously, the 'sadness' mentioned in the first sentence of *Argonauts.* In this book he gives (for all his sceptical and ironic self-appraisal) a striking confession of his belief, shared with Rousseau, that it 'would have been better for our well-being' if mankind had stayed in the neolithic stage of evolution (1955/1973:446). In the same book, the chapter headed 'Virtuous savages' complains of the 'wretchedness' of Indians living near peasant villages and parades his aesthetic and at least implicitly moral admiration for Bororo, Nambikwara and other 'comparatively untouched' societies - representing them with pictures such as the naked adolescent girl captioned simply: 'A Nambikwara smile' (1955/1973: 234-5).

So Lévi-Strauss was interested in happiness and had some strong if absurdly under-theorised views on what makes people happy. Yet he wasn't interested enough in happiness to consider it worthwhile commenting, in that same chapter, on the morality of his act of selling a gun to a Bororo man, or on the morality of the extreme inequality in Bororo society, or on the men's use of rape as a punishment for women who stray too close to the men's house (pp 247, 252). Gripped as he was by the powerful rhetoric of the Lost Eden myth with which Malinowski had started *Argonauts,* Lévi-Strauss appears to have been incapable of standing back and offering serious analysis or empirical scrutiny of the myth of primitive happiness.

It is hard to think of a more tragic figure in the history of anthropology than Colin Turnbull. He wrote elegantly and inspired millions of readers to dream about alternative ways in which our lives could be organised and to appreciate some of the cultural values associated with simple life-styles. Yet his ethnographic caricatures and self-contradictions are arguably a source of embarrassment to academic anthropology.

His 1961 book *The Forest People* is perhaps the most celebrated of all 'lost Eden' ethnographies, portraying the BaMbuti pygmies of the Ituri as happy and natural people. From the first chapter they and their forest are introduced in positive evaluative terms. Their life is 'a wonderful thing full of joy and happiness and free of care'. Their knowledge of the forest is better than that of scientists. They 'have no fear, because for them there is no danger'. 'For them there is little hardship'. They are 'powerful and tough', less clumsy than their non-forest neighbours. They are 'simple, unaffected …captivating' (1961:29,18-19, 27). He himself grew to share the BaMbuti's 'complete faith … in the goodness of their forest world' and their mystical appreciation of 'the presence of the forest itself' (1961:88), despite its evident dangers and serious shortcomings as a source of the wherewithal for basic subsistence. He indulges with gentle amusement the BaMbutis' stealing from neighbouring people and their racist disparagement of 'negroes' as 'animals'.

Still, Turnbull is evidently wary of the potential charge of romanticism, for he also says that 'the pygmies are no more perfect than any other people and life, though kind to them, is not without its hardships' (1961: 27). Implicitly, then, while trying to persuade us to fall in love with the care-free and pleasant and aesthetically pleasing BaMbuti, he is telling us that they are 'no more perfect' than their settled neighbours, the 'negro tribes' who are 'a rather shifty, lazy lot' (1961/1984: 36). Perhaps the BaMbuti are not even any better than the Ik of Uganda, who Turnbull later described as 'a people without life, without passion, beyond humanity' (1973: 243). The BaMbuti must have suffered a serious cognitive deficiency if they really were, as he claims, unaware of the real dangers and hardships they face.

If those that survived really were as happy as Turnbull said they were and if they really were unaware of danger, then they surely didn't offer an enviable model for human flourishing: not many of us would value happiness if it came at the cost of the most basic ecological awareness. But which part do we believe: that Mbuti life has a 'full complement of hardships and problems and tragedies' or (continuing the same sentence!), that it is 'free of care'

(1961/1984: 29)? Do we believe that 'for them there is no danger' or that elderly Mbuti people are terrified they will be left to die of starvation because everyone knows they 'may endanger the safety of the group' (1961/1984:19, 38). That BaMbuti really trust the Forest, or that they sing about the goodness of the Forest and flatter it with the metaphor of parenthood, because they are actually deeply conscious of its dangers and shortcomings. The truth, as ought surely to have been evident to any reader of Turnbull's books, is that he was about as untrustworthy and self-contradictory as an anthropologist could be. This is hardly news to most anthropologists, but it is interesting as an example of the difficulties that arise from our discipline's profound ambivalences towards our evaluative responsibilities. What is tragic about Turnbull is that despite being infinitely better than most anthropologists at capturing the public imagine and braver than most in making explicit evaluative statements about the people he wrote about, he was unable to give his ethnographies even a veneer of scientific or moral credibility. Even the most rudimentary theorising of the quality of life and of the dimensions of happiness, could have helped him overcome those weaknesses while retaining the popular appeal of this books.

Another more recent and still-active populariser of the Lost Eden myth is Helena Norberg-Hodge. Her book *Ancient Futures* (1991) tells a story about how traditional Ladakhi culture had the secret of happiness, but that this happiness is now under threat from modern development. A chapter headed 'Joie de vivre' presents Ladakhis as the happy people: 'The Ladakhis possess an irrepressible joie de vivre - their sense of joy seems so firmly anchored within them that circumstances cannot shake it loose' (1991:83). Her own initial assumption was that this was only a display of happiness, that underneath they couldn't always be so happy. She dismisses such scepticism as a product of 'cultural blinders':

  Without knowing it, I had been assuming that there were no significant cultural differences in the human potential for happiness. […] Of course the Ladakhis have sorrows and problems and of course they feel sad when faced with illness or death. What I have seen is not an absolute difference; it is a question of degree. …With so much of our lives [sic: ie: in the industrialised West] coloured by a sense of insecurity or fear, we have difficulty in letting go and feeling at one with ourselves and our surroundings. The Ladakhis, on the other hand, seem to possess an extended, inclusive sense of self. They do not, as we do [sic], retreat behind boundaries of fear and self-protection; in fact, they seem to be totally lacking in what we would call pride. This doesn't mean a lack of

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self-respect. On the contrary, their self-respect is so deep-rooted as to be unquestioned. […] I have never met people who seem so healthy emotionally, so secure, as the Ladakhis. The reasons are, of course, complex and spring from a whole way of life and world view. But I am sure that the most important factor is the sense that you are a part of something much larger than yourself, that you are inextricably connected to others and to your surroundings. (1991: 84-85)

Such passages offer unusually explicit analysis of links between culture and emotional well-being. Some of the examples and interpretations are certainly suggestive of important qualities of Ladakhi philosophies and attitudes that would be worth further study. But without an interpretive framework based on cross-cultural happiness theory and with the comparative dimension relying on the crude rhetorical strategy of 'bad West' and 'bad modernity' versus 'good East' and 'good tradition', this kind of writing is hardly going to help anthropology gain a foothold in international happiness research.

Finally, the prize for the most influential analytical text in the 'Lost Eden' category must go to Sahlins for his 'Original affluent society' essay. This was a bold but ill-conceived and morally irresponsible attempt to reinterpret hunter-gatherer culture through a metaphor of Zen Buddhism's want-limiting road to 'affluence'. This suggestion that people living in abject poverty are in some sense *choosing* poverty is rather chilling, particularly in light of the patent absurdity of likening a hunter-gatherer underclass to the elite exponents of Zen. Zen was devised as a countercultural creed: followers chose to limit their material desires and consumptions as part of their ongoing struggle for social distinction, not as a livelihood strategy in a resource-poor environment. Still, this idea has for decades proved intuitively appealing enough to warrant the inclusion of that article on countless introductory anthropology courses. Generations of anthropology neophytes, most of them temporary sojourners studying anthropology as an optional extra, have been persuaded that happiness lies in voluntary acceptance of material deprivation.

Anthropologies of 'mental health', 'welfare', and suffering

If anthropology were generally ignoring or deliberately avoiding the subject of happiness, this would be less surprising (although still noteworthy) if there existed a specialist niche of happiness anthropology. If there were a school of happiness anthropology we could then draw an analogy with the cold-

shouldering of the subject of development, which tends to be seen (quite wrongly of course) as a subject best left to a small number of specialising in the anthropology of development. But the anthropology of happiness doesn't (yet) have its own research networks or schools or textbooks or courses. Anthropology's silence on the subject of happiness becomes much more conspicuous when we explore those texts where we most expect to find discussion of happiness. It is when anthropologists and others claim to be researching 'mental health' or 'welfare' but are actually researching mental illness and ill-being and when they discuss mental illness and suffering without theorising the converse of these, that the silence on happiness becomes most striking and puzzling.

Edgar and Russell's *The Anthropology of Welfare* (1998) promises in its promotional blurb to 'provide an overview of what anthropology has to offer welfare studies and vice-versa'. Yet it is about as ethnocentric as it is possible to be, treating 'welfare' in the narrow sense of European state policies for addressing particular kinds of unmet need and suffering. Although the introduction (p1) defines welfare as 'the process of normalizing or optimizing the wellbeing of dependent individuals, organisations and societies' the rest of the book ignores the subject of wellbeing or quality of life, focusing instead on various forms of dependency, community support and on the provision of services to disadvantaged people. Worthy though much of the ethnography and analysis of these services may be, I can't help but wonder at how these authors between them managed to avoid questioning whether they had an adequate understanding of wellbeing and its causes on which to base their (usually implicit) advocacy for improved welfare services. It is a further source of astonishment that this collection of anthropology conference papers can have missed or rejected the possibility that a cross-cultural perspective on well-being and on welfare services might have enriched their analysis.

Geert Hofstede is one of the few anthropologists who have explicitly written about happiness in cross-cultural perspective, although few anthropologists have taken much note of his work which is better known among social psychologists. His monumental work *Culture's Consequences* (1980/2001) includes over 30 index references to 'life satisfaction' and a further 20 references to 'job satisfaction' - both of which are issues which surely ought to be central to any conception of mental health yet are surprisingly rarely discussed under that rubric. Though this work is undoubtedly one of the most influential and frequently-cited social science texts, its emphasis on numerical analysis of bold cross-cultural comparisons means that it is a long way from

mainstream anthropology. His later work, *Cultures and Organisations: Software of the Mind* (1991/1997), similarly emphasises cultural diversity in life goals, in happiness concepts and theories and in the achievement of happiness. Although in both these works the emphasis is on statistical analysis of data from questionnaires, there is some qualitative information and analysis. One anecdote is particularly suggestive:

> Lord Robert Baden Powell, founder of the international Boy Scouts movement, wrote a book for Rover Scouts (boys over age 16) called *Rovering to Success.* Its translation into Dutch, dating from the 1920s, is called *Zwervend op de weg naar levengeluk* - 'Rovering on the Road to Happiness'. To the Dutch translators "success" was not a goal likely to appeal to young men. The word in Dutch has a flavour of quackery. No youth leader would defend it as a purpose to life. (Hofstede 1991: 98)

Hofstede's interpretation is that UK cultural attitudes have been and still are much more 'masculine' and 'aggressive' than the Netherlands, emphasising work, 'economic growth' and work-related achievements rather than happiness. Impressive and fascinating though Hofstede's work is, this glib labelling of broad cultural patterns as 'masculine' and 'feminine' is hardly likely to win admiration among serious social scientists.

As noted above in the discussion of pathologism to the extent that anthropologists have researched and written about the emotions they have mainly focused on negative emotions. A typical example of the general approach is Harré and Parrott, 1996, who offer a collection of articles on the broad theme of *The Emotions.* The negative bias is clear from table of contents (papers on embarrassment, guilt, remorse, shame, regret, grief, plus some general ones but none on positive emotions such as love, hope, or happiness). The index has multiple entries for several negative emotions, but the only positive emotion indexed at all is 'hope' (which is in any case arguably not an emotion and is certainly not unambiguously positive).
In the third of three volumes on 'social suffering', Das and Kleinman (2001) announce on the first page of the Introduction that the six essays are about 'social trauma and the remaking of everyday life', focusing on how 'in the midst of the worst horrors, people continue to live, to survive, and to cope.' These three terms all refer, of course, to just one thing: the extraordinary fact that people continue to remain alive and human at all, having gone through obscene shocks and suffering. Despite one promising mention, later in the Introduction (p10), of essays addressing the 're-imagination of well-being', this

collection is overwhelmingly about coping with horrific experiences and memories, rather than about building happiness. While the stories about coping are inspiring and suggestive of lessons for policy and practice, the essays in general give an inadequate analysis of well-being as an achievement or as an aspiration. They offer virtually no account of what lessons might be drawn concerning happiness strategies and the management of emotions (by individuals and collectivities) in all human situations not just situations of extreme suffering.

Kleinman is the undisputed archdeacon of the anthropology of mental illness and suffering. He has written thousands of fascinating and strongly policy-relevant pages on these subjects and it is hard to think of a better example of a morally good and practical approach to the anthropology of morality. Nonetheless, there is something seriously deficient about any account of mental illness or suffering which is silent on the subjects of wellbeing and happiness. An analogous deficiency would be an anthropology of hate and violence which neglected to discuss love and peace, or anthropology of evil which failed to look at concepts of goodness. Or, conversely, let us imagine the chorus of complaints that would greet any anthropologist who wrote a book on health and wellbeing that paid no attention to illness and suffering. Similarly, in *Saints, Scholars, and Schizophrenics,* a popular classic on mental illness, unhappiness, 'demoralisation' and 'cultural disintegration', Scheper-Hughes (1979) managed to write some 240 pages on these various sadnesses and pathologies without pausing to consider who, in rural West of Ireland in the 1970s, was actually achieving happiness, or how, or what their aspirations and concepts of happiness were. Scheper-Hughes (1979:79) even cited Devereux's (1956) assertion that the key challenge in psychiatric anthropology is to identify cultural definitions of 'normal' versus 'abnormal' mental conditions, but proceeded to ignore the main implication of that challenge. I can find no references to happiness or well-being in the book and the closest she gets to a mention of happiness is when she refers to old bachelors getting 'deep enjoyment' from teasing children with kidnapping threats which reveal 'unconscious maliciousness' deriving from their 'envy' or 'resentment' of parents. It is hard to discern how or why so many anthropologists have proceeded with their research on mental illness with so little attention to the cultural definition of the distinctions between happiness and adverse mental states.

Anthropology of violence and peace-making

Ashley Montagu quotes an exchange of letters through which Einstein asked Freud if there was any hope of mankind becoming peaceful, to which Freud replied:

> In some happy corners of the earth, they say, where nature brings forth abundantly whatever man desires, there flourish races whose lives go gently by unknowing of aggression and constraint. This I can hardly credit. (Freud 1939, quoted by Montagu 1994: xi)

Whether or not Freud's dismal view of innate aggression is reasonable, we can probably all agree that violence between humans is one of the most significant influences on happiness worldwide and conversely that it may be influenced by the ways in which the pursuit and achievement of happiness are culturally patterned. All cultures associate their concepts of happiness and the good life with peace and security to some extent, even if they offset this with notions that a good life must also include violent excitement or that happiness is a limited good which must be fought for. As Mauss noted in 'The Gift', there is 'goodness and happiness' which comes from 'imposed peace' brought about by gift exchange, mutual respect and reciprocal generosity (1925/1969:81). The anthropology of violence and peace-making is therefore a promising source for knowledge about concepts of happiness and about the influences on happiness. But this is largely an unrealised potential in anthropology, as most discussions of these issues focus on the manifestations of violence and peace rather than looking at the bigger picture in an evaluative way to explore how these activities relate to happiness philosophy and to the overall quality of life.

A famous example of an inadequately evaluative ethnography which made claims about happiness and non-violence is Lorna Marshall's book *The Harmless People,* which portrayed the !Kung as happy and peace-loving, managing to overlook the appalling rates of !Kung-!Kung violence and murder. Lee's book (1979:399-400) rightly exposes this travesty in unforgiving terms. Yet he himself was so concerned to offset popular assumptions about the insecurity of hunter-gatherer life that he went on, nonetheless, to make some highly questionable assertions about the 'security of life' among the !Kung in particular and foraging people in general. The 'evidence', he argued, was that this 'way of life' is known to have persisted in the same areas for thousands of years even though 'personnel have changed' (1979:438).   Like Sahlins, driven, despite himself, by romanticism, Lee seems to reveal a shocking callousness here. It is simply implausible, and certainly distasteful, to argue

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that people are 'secure' if their way of life survives through the 'personnel change' of high infant mortality and murder rates.

Despite such pervasive romanticism and true to the pathologism of the social sciences in general, anthropology has tended to focus far more on conflict than on peace-making (Gregor and Sponsel, 1994:xv). Whether they study warfare or peace-making or - more sensibly - both, to do so without studying conceptions of human flourishing is rather missing the point of these activities. Texts on conflict and peace-making (such as those in Gregor and Sponsel's 1994 collection) tend to lack an explicit link to the philosophy of human flourishing or to the psychology of motives. Whether people pursue violent conflict or try to make peace, they are presumably motivated by some conception of a good life which either war, or peace, or some optimum balance between these, can give them. Michelle Rosaldo's book *Knowledge and Passion: Ilongot Notions of Self and Social Life* (1980) is widely regarded as a classic in the anthropology of emotion. Like most of this school of anthropology, it focuses on adverse and dangerous emotion. 'Passion' seems to be understood here mainly in the original sense derived from the Latin *patere,* 'to suffer', although also more actively in the idea that anger is a key motive for action. Rosaldo's account clearly conforms to the pathological approach: her index lists over 50 references to the concept of *liget* (tension, anger) and just three to *sipe* (happiness). She states as a fact that in one community 65 out of 70 men over twenty years of age had murdered and beheaded people.

Ironically, given her evident belief that these were true accounts of killings, Rosaldo also conforms to the 'Lost Eden' ethos. Her Preface waxes romantic about a glamourous world that was on the wane by the time she arrived:

 I find myself overwhelmed with gratitude and nostalgia for a world that is typified by the warmth, consideration, and playfulness of people …this book embodies my desire to celebrate these Ilongots in the context of political and economic developments that seem more than likely to crush them - developments that I have not learned how to change. (1980:xiv)

There is no mention here or anywhere else of any moral disgust at murder. She even appears to accept uncritically her informants' view that lopping off someone's head is 'not murder' (1980:52). She disparages unreservedly the advent of modern development, refusing even to countenance the possibility

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that outsiders might bring some material benefits and moral virtues which might help Ilongot people live happier, longer, and less violent lives.

It is hard not to let Rosaldo's astonishing failure to develop an adequate moral interpretation of the quality of Ilongot life spoil our enjoyment of her fascinating, if brief, discussions of the relationships between anger and happiness in Ilongot culture. 'To be happy for an Ilongot is to be light, clear-headed, healthy, and free of constraint. The happy heart is "weightless"; it is "fluttering" and "vibrant"' - all conditions which come from releasing the 'weight' of anger, *liget,* by beheading someone. Happiness, for them, 'suggests activity and sociality and has little to do with quietness, tranquillity or peace' but is 'born of liget and agitation' (1980: 51-52).

Accounts like this concerning indigenous explanations of how the different emotions relate to each other could be of great significance in working towards an appreciation of universals and diversity in emotional theories and emotional experiences. Particularly interesting here, for example, is the recognition that the relationship between happiness and anger is not just one of antagonism but to some extent one of mutuality. This could even be of relevance to social policy, offering guidance in social and psychological realism to those trying to promote peace. Dentan's account of five kinds of 'peace group' in the USA, which admires their success in peace-making and in recruitment of large numbers of people, concludes sceptically with the assertion that these exceptional, introverted, xenophobic and mainly middle-class groups don't 'offer concrete models for social action in enormous nation-states' and further that they 'have paid a price for their success' largely because in creating communal values they have suppressed individual creativity, education and freedom. The implication seems to be that overzealous promotion of communitarian peace leads down the slippery slope towards the kinds of absurd manipulation of the human spirit caricatured by the Violent Passion Surrogate in Huxley's *Brave New World* (1971). Perhaps somewhere in between their loss of creativity and the Ilongot loss of security lies a happy medium.

Anthropologies of religion, communitarianism, and morality

Given the strong emphasis, in all religious systems, on the quest for happiness (this-worldly and/or other-worldly) and the relationship between happiness and virtue, it is astonishing how little discussion is devoted to happiness in

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anthropological texts on religion. It is as if experience, motives and moral evaluation were written out of the script.

An exception is Geertz's (1960) ethnography of Javanese culture, which addresses happiness fairly explicitly, promoting recognition of the cultural specificity in aspirations towards happiness. *Religion of Java* describes how the idea of flattening the emotions, evident in all the traditions discussed, is particularly marked in the eliti *prijaji* tradition where texts and gurus preach the importance of recognising the inner connectedness of happiness and unhappiness. They also preach the moral superiority of quiescence or peace (*Bedja)*, like some Buddhist teaching emphasising the illusory nature of happiness and the pointlessness of the pursuit of happiness (1960: 312-314). Noteworthy in this text is Geertz's lack of commentary on the sociology, politics and morality of this philosophical denial of happiness. He gives no evaluation, no assessment of how such statements rejecting happiness as a life goal might be a form of class-based elitism (despite his frequent reminders elsewhere in the text that prijaji philosophy and practice is 'elitist').
In *The Interpretation of Culture,* Geertz (1973) returns to the happiness theme, discussing how Javanese people conceive of their inner selves as a microcosm of the universe in a unified theory of subjective 'feeling' or 'ethos' and objective 'meaning' or 'world view' (1973: 134). Individuals are said to have a proximate aim of emotional quiescence (crude passions being associated with children, animals, madmen, primitives and foreigners) as well as an ultimate aim of gnosis (1973: 135). Javanese ethics and aesthetics are focused on achieving and displaying equanimity in despite of everyday perturbations. In this portrayal Geertz seeks to offset speculative Western moral philosophy with cross-cultural analysis of empirical information.

One of the more surprising self-declared anthropologists of happiness is none other than Pope John Paul II; whose 1997 book *The Theology of the Body* proposes an 'adequate anthropology' as the basis for understanding heavenly happiness and its implications for earthly vocations. Though not conspicuously based on any engagement with academic anthropology or cross-cultural study, the Pope's treatise is interesting in that it is clearly an attempt at top-down modernisation of one of the world's most influential institutions by urging Christians to accept that human bodily desires are not only natural but good in themselves and part of the other-wordly 'heaven' to which their lives ought to lead. In effect, what he proposes is a mingling of theology with anthropology as the basis for an understanding of happiness which is both physical and metaphysical.

TOWARDS A SYSTEMATIC AND POLICY-ORIENTED ANTHROPOLOGY OF HAPPINESS

Appadurai (2002:2) has argued eloquently that the 'capacity to aspire' is a key element in empowerment of the poor and one which along with future orientation more generally has been under-emphasised in development theory. More generally, he has argued that 'the future remains a stranger to most anthropological models of culture. By default and also for independent reasons, economics has become the science of the future.' Although not explicitly about happiness, but rather about the concepts of empowerment, dignity and future-orientation, Appadurai's argument is implicitly an argument for both anthropologists and development theorists and planners to take happiness more seriously as an aspect of social justice and planning.

I trust that I have adequately demonstrated that there has been a regrettable inadequacy in anthropology's treatment of happiness topics over the past century or so and that this is indicative of broader patterns of bias within and beyond anthropology which are worth struggling against. No doubt there is a lot of interesting further work to be done in scrutinising anthropology's missed opportunities as well as its piecemeal and indirect contributions to understanding happiness. But it is more important that we proceed now to engage responsibly in happiness research and to this end I sketch out here some of the kinds of theme which I envisage might stimulate a new generation of happiness anthropologists.

Much of this new research ought to be useful for guiding policies and practices. Yet this will be harder still than the challenge of engaging with other happiness researchers, since so far even well-developed happiness theories of Psychology and Philosophy have shown remarkably little interest in policy engagement and social development policy-makers and practitioners have shown remarkably little interest in happiness research. It is hard to imagine talking about policy objectives (of businesses, governments or any kind of organisation) with any rational person for long without reaching an agreement on two points:

- That policies do, in fact, influence emotional experience and life satisfaction; and

- that they ought, in principle, to be based on some appreciation of desirable emotional outcomes and satisfactions and how these can be brought about.

Where, then, in the policy literature (policy documents, policy analyses, evaluation documents) do we find the expected sections on hope, happiness, love, trust, anger, and so on? Lakoff and Kövecses (1987:195) once argued that 'emotions are often considered to be feelings alone and as such they are viewed as being devoid of conceptual content.'   Their emphatic rejection of such a limiting view of emotions can usefully be extended to scrutinise the mutual influences of policies and emotions. Bhutan remains the only country in the world to have chosen 'Gross National Happiness' as the overarching policy objective (see eg: Bhutan Studies, 2004). The UK Government Cabinet Office recently produced a think-piece paper on the implications of life satisfaction research for government policy (headed on every page with the strikingly defensive caveat: 'This is not a statement of government policy'). The paper comes to the commonsense conclusion that life satisfaction must be a central concern for government policy-making. But what is most interesting is that this idea is presented so cautiously and defensively, as if it were novel and controversial:

> If we accept that life satisfaction is an important objective and can be influenced, then the literature throws down a fundamental challenge to policymakers. If decades of legislation, economic growth and increased life expectancy have barely affected the life satisfaction of the British people, then what should government be doing? (Donovan and Halpern, 2002: 33)

Although there is some interest, worldwide, in the idea of a 'beauty contest' list ranking nations or societies or cultures according to how well they perform in facilitating their members' happiness, such a list, like the Human Development Index, would not be particularly meaningful without the kinds of contextual analysis and real-life stories that ethnographic research could provide. Far more important, for policy and practice, would be the work of discerning cultural patterns and national or sub-national performance in facilitating happiness among specific categories of people and in specific life domains. Such knowledge, again, can only to a limited extent come from survey-based social psychological data. Most importantly, broad-brushed statistical analysis can only impressionistically hint at causes of happiness, whereas ethnography could at least show us how people's behaviour and decision-making is informed by their understanding and appreciation of happiness and their

causal theories. Yet so far, for cross-cultural happiness comparison surveys are more or less the only game in town and these are not really very cross-cultural - they tend to be Western-biased both in their focus and in their personnel and in many cases are focused on (predominantly female) college students.

A key area of debate is the space which should be allowed for subjectivity and cultural variability in concepts of well-being. As in all discussions of cultural and moral relativism, the issue of the limits of tolerance looms large. One frequently discussed issue concerns the moral hazards in lending too much moral weight to subjective self-assessment. People may be happy or unhappy for morally unsound reasons. Horrid people may derive happiness from horrid deeds; poor people may hedonically adapt to find happiness in conditions of deprivation which the rest of us find morally unacceptable. At higher cultural levels, too, external objective criteria for well-being may be ones which ought to inform broader international ethical scrutiny.

A telling illustration of how a global organisation can fall into serious moral problems through naive cultural relativism is the World Health Organisation's Quality of Life measure. Though based mainly on universal measures of well-being, it endorses culturally specific criteria in the interest of 'conceptual equivalence' to ensure representation of local concerns. The India team decided that the standard WHOQOL questions on personal appearance weren't specific enough and added a new question: 'How satisfied are you with the complexion of your skin?' (Skevington, Bradshaw and Saxena, 1999: 483, 485). The above writers' only comment on this is to say that they approve the specificity of this question which covers 'concerns about skin complexion that affect social encounters in everyday life on the sub-continent'. Quite apart from the scientific questionability of using such a leading question to assess well-being, this looks perilously close to an endorsement of racist values under the banner of cultural relativism. What would Indian people in London or New York think if they were asked how happy they were with their skin colour?

The research questions listed below are by no means exhaustive, but it does seem promising to assess the various research potentials using four broad categories: *conceptual, descriptive-empirical, methodological* and *normative*. It would not be helpful to try to classify each piece of work under one heading, but I hope these categories may prove fruitful in assessing the various potential contributions of happiness anthropology.

Conceptual and philosophical analysis

- *What is the range of variation in the ways in which concepts of 'happiness' are patterned? What is the cognitive significance of this variety?*

Some cultures may have more words for happiness than others do and this may or may not reveal greater or less cultural sophistication or interest in distinguishing among mental states and assessments of well-being. Some may emphasise markedly different kinds of distinction, for example individual versus collective, or momentary versus enduring, or good versus bad kinds of happiness.

- *What can we learn about the pursuit of happiness from studying the diversity of happiness concepts and their deployment in diverse cultures?*

Happiness terms and concepts may be expected to influence or reflect the ways in which individuals chart their intended life trajectories and make life decisions and the rationales used to guide the policies and decisions of collectivities such as governments. The overall status of happiness as a life purpose may be highly variable. Even if all individuals and cultures value happiness, we vary immensely in the degree to which we accept it as the supreme good or the core life purpose. In some philosophies, happiness is defined as just one among several life purposes - alongside and not necessarily above others such as virtue, religious merit and knowledge. In situations where there is cultural emphasis on diverse ultimate goods, happiness may be seen as complementary or as antagonistic to these other goals.

- *How should we interpret the evident differences in the degree of emphasis on other-worldly orientation and on virtues rather than pleasures as the core meaning of life?*

Insofar as we do aspire to happiness as the key objective of life, we vary greatly in the degree of deferment which we accept. For some, imminent happiness is the key objective, the idea being that we ought to try to achieve happiness daily throughout our lives. Others put much more emphasis on working, suffering and deferring pleasures now in order to achieve happiness later in life or even in an afterlife or in an imagined future life.

- *Is happiness primarily a condition and ambition of individuals, or are there collective happinesses and collective routes to happiness?*

We vary greatly in the degree to which we perceive our happiness as dependent on other peoples' happiness, on our contributions to others' happiness. For example, people in 'the West' are often portrayed as more individualistic and those in 'the East' as more interested in collective pursuit of goals. If happiness is seen mainly as an individual matter it is unlikely to feature prominently in policy except perhaps in special areas such as mental health policy. If seen as collective, happiness could be assumed to be susceptible to manipulation by diverse policies and legislation, although this would not necessarily translate into a general foregrounding of happiness as a policy goal.

- *Is happiness sometimes seen as a limited good? If so, how would this manifest itself in practice?*

In contrast to obviously limited goods such as power, prestige and material wealth, happiness can be seen as potentially unlimited. But it can also be conceived as intrinsically limited by factors such as relativism (other people's happiness makes us relatively less happy) or by the idea that happiness is dependent on access to limited goods. Views on this question may influence policies and the degree to which happiness and its display are valued.

Descriptions and information

- *Are some cultures or culture traits or practices better at making people happy?*

Although this question is evaluative it is not in itself normative. Evaluative assessment is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the development of happiness-related policies. Indeed, there are enormous challenges in interpretation before we could reasonably jump to policy conclusions based on evaluation of cultural phenomena.

- *Is the patterning of happiness through the life-cycle similar or markedly different across cultures?*

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There are marked cultural differences in the ways in which the life-cycle is divided, in which age-appropriate behaviour is defined and in which relationships between people of different ages and life-cycle stages are expected to be conducted. All of these influence the experience and evaluation of different phases of life. Some cultures or practices may tend to favour happiness in childhood, others may detract from happiness in childhood and this may or may not be justified in terms of rewards in later life phases. Perhaps research and policy debate on these issues could lead towards an agreement on reasonable universal expectations for ensuring optimum happiness in all ages in all cultures.

- *Is the gender distribution of happiness more unequal in different cultures?*

As with all kinds of inequality, the description and analysis of gender inequality is meaningless without clarifying the goods whose distribution we are concerned with. Even if it is clear that in most or all cultures wealth and power and status are distributed in gender-biased ways, it still remains an empirical question whether these inequalities translate into less or more happiness for women relative to men. And further, of course, there is the question of how gender inequalities affect the happiness of both men and women in general.

- *What do happiness-affirming or happiness-denying discourses really mean? How are they deployed, and with what kinds of effect?*

For example, individuals and cultures vary in their attitudes or principles concerning the display of happiness and sadness. For some, appearing happy even in adversity is a guiding moral principle on the understanding that showing sadness amounts to loss of face or to a selfish distribution of something undesirable. For others, displaying happiness may be disapproved, perhaps because of an underlying belief that happiness is a limited good. Or both happiness and sadness may be regarded as emotions that must not be overtly or grossly displayed.

- *To what extent are beliefs about the causes of happiness culturally patterned, empirical, and consistent or rational?*

Our views on the various means for achieving happiness are highly varied, and we further vary in our ability or willingness to imagine and respect other people's and other cultures' alternative routes to happiness. In Western

culture, for example, there are deep-rooted inconsistencies, at individual and collective levels, between our long tradition of questioning the links between money or material well-being and happiness, on the one hand, and pursuing monetary wealth on the other. Possibly all cultures and all individuals hold similarly ambiguous beliefs and values, but it may also be the case - as is often asserted - that some cultures emphasise money as the route to happiness whereas others emphasise virtues or non-material values as the route to happiness.

Research methods

- *What kinds of value can ethnographic research methods add to the study of happiness?*

We need to understand better the values and shortcomings of ethnographic research in relation to questionnaire surveys and abstract philosophising. Advertising the potential values of ethnography is likely to have more plausibility if it is evidence-based and if the limits and shortcomings are acknowledged alongside the values.

- *What are the potentials for interdisciplinary happiness research?*

Anthropologists are notoriously autonomous and individualistic and have a poor track record at interdisciplinary collaboration. Qualitative and evaluative anthropological work could no doubt be enriched through collaboration with others, such as social psychologists, who are better equipped to devise and analyse questionnaire surveys on happiness, or with philosophers who are perhaps better practised at epistemological analysis but lack empirical cross-cultural examples on which to base their analysis.

- *How can we promote subjective viewpoints in policy-making without sacrificing diversity and integrity?*

There is a continuing populist trend among international development agencies who increasingly expect policies, practices and evaluations to be based on the subjective assessments made by the 'clients' of development interventions. Anthropologists could help devise sophisticated methods which would

minimise the risk of simplistic and univocal misrepresentations of 'people's wisdom' concerning their wellbeing and the influences on it.

Normative and policy questions

- *Could an improved anthropology of happiness offer guidance for better social policy?*

The driving force behind this paper has been the faith in the possibility that new anthropological scrutiny of happiness topics may ultimately translate into better policies and practices. Since I believe in happiness as a core component but not the only component of human flourishing, by 'better' I mean *both* 'more likely to produce happiness' *and* 'more likely to result in a suitable balance between happiness outcomes and other objectives such as the processes of social justice, choice, and creativity'.

- *Could the existing plethora of happiness guides be radically redrafted in the light of cross-cultural research?*

There are many thousands of books purporting to guide us, mainly as individuals, towards greater happiness in this world or in imagined future worlds. Few of these make serious attempts at basing prescriptions on empirical research on happiness, let alone cross-cultural ethnographic research. My assumption is that such guides, which clearly exist because there is a market for them which is driven by a belief that we can influence our happiness and that of others, might well be improved through reference to whatever empirical or interpretive anthropology might teach us about happiness.

- *Can anthropology transform itself into a more effectively evaluative discipline by taking happiness more seriously than it has done in the past?*

This is the biggest and most important question of all. Anthropology arose as an evaluative and moral discipline, concerned not just to describe, interpret and compare societies, but also to subject them to moral scrutiny. The last century has seen the withering of this moral component, although there have been some signs of morality regaining a foothold in our discipline. To turn this foothold into a movement we need more than just a few individuals courageous enough to declare publicly their moral scruples and preferences; we need to

mainstream evaluation within our discipline until it becomes a required and normal part of our research and analysis. Central to this requirement is the need to develop stronger evaluative tools, as well as the will to evaluate, so as to convey clear and convincing messages concerning whether specific cultural traditions and practices are good or bad for mental health and life satisfaction.

CONCLUSION

Good friends are evaluative. False friends offer evaluations only in the form of flattery. To the extent that our anthropological writing remains, overall, non-evaluative, then we are being unfriendly to the people we have worked with - cold, heartless, detached, unloving and unlovely. If we fail to use anthropological insights to promote happiness and prevent avoidable suffering, we are being unfriendly to humanity in general.

For many years, anthropologists were irresponsibly quiet about unhappiness and injustice. For several decades, an increasing proportion of more responsible and morally committed anthropologists have been working hard to offset that shameful legacy and have produced an increasingly rich and useful set of ethnographies and analyses of suffering and injustice and in many cases have been actively involved in putting such knowledge to good use. But knowledge about suffering and injustice and the good uses to which it is put, are inadequate for a genuinely evaluative and moral anthropology.

I hope, therefore, that anthropologists will soon become much more interested in the analysis of happiness. I trust that in doing so they will come closer to meeting their evaluative responsibilities. They will become morally better, because they will make better contributions to the understanding and promotion of happiness and, in so doing so, who knows they may even become happier themselves.

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