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# Radical & Happiness





# Radical Happiness

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In the recent expansion of research on and public interest in happiness, most attention has been on the individual, inviting people to change their thoughts and behaviors, for example through becoming more optimistic and grateful and therefore happier. Critics say this serves to make people more accepting of the political and economic status quo, with all its inequalities and exploitation. However, it is also possible to draw radical implications from happiness research, following an agenda to reshape social arrangements to foster the greater good, for example equalizing incomes, reducing commercialism and fostering altruism, cooperative learning and workers' self-management. This agenda, which can be called "radical happiness," is largely anarchist in orientation. To promote this agenda, activism can be imbued with fun and optimism, an application of happiness research to the process of social change.

There is a new orientation within psychological research and practice called positive psychology. Traditional psychology devoted most attention to people in negative states, such as depression and anxiety, seeking to bring them, through drugs or talking therapies, towards a less negative mental state. Positive psychology, in contrast, is concerned with those in the middle ranges of well-being, seeking to enable them to become more satisfied with life. There has always been some research on happiness and other positive aspects of people's lives; the rise of positive psychology has made this a more thriving and respectable facet of psychological research.<sup>1</sup>

Along with the rise of positive psychology has been an explosion of popular interest in happiness, with untold books, articles and programmes devoted to what is involved in becoming happier. Some of these treatments are capable popularizations of research findings;<sup>2</sup> others are based on the experiences and insights of individuals, often with an overlap with research or loosely based on it.

The move to study happiness has been greatest in psychology, which has taken what can be called the happiness movement in a highly individualistic direction. Psychology as a field of study puts primary attention on individuals, though some, notably social psychologists, look at individuals within groups. Psychologists studying well-being consequently have looked primarily at manifestations and interventions at the level of the individual, such as what factors make people satisfied with their lives and what changes in thinking and behavior will increase their satisfaction. Fewer sociologists, political scientists and economists have shifted their research agendas into the field of happiness studies, so there is less attention to social, political and economic

policies and structures.

The happiness movement has been especially strong in the U.S., where there is great emphasis on individual achievement and responsibility compared to other wealthy parts of the world such as Japan and Germany where collectives – families, businesses and the government – are expected to provide support. In this context, it is not surprising that in the U.S. happiness is largely seen as an individual responsibility, rather than something to be promoted by changes in social arrangements.

Despite its origins and host breeding grounds being highly individualistic in orientation, positive psychology has radical potential: it is possible to draw conclusions from it that challenge current social arrangements. Indeed, positive psychology is especially compatible with radical conclusions, particularly in the direction of self-management.

The next section gives an overview of findings from positive psychology relevant to social change. Then several findings are examined a bit more closely, spelling out their potential anarchist-oriented implications. After that, I look at strategies for happiness-driven social action.

## Happiness research

How can you tell whether someone is happy? The easiest way is to ask them, and that is exactly what researchers do, for example asking "How satisfied are you with your life, on a scale of 1 to 10?" A person's answer is inevitably subjective: one person's 8 out of 10 might be equivalent to another person's 6. However, answers collected over groups and over time are remarkably stable. It is possible to plot an individual's answers over the course of a day or an entire country's answers over decades.

Researchers have developed a solid body of findings, built on extensive observations and data collection, ingenious experiments, close attention to methodology and due regard to limitations. Like any other field drawing on mainstream disciplines such as psychology and economics, researchers value their reputations highly and their reputations are built on the quality of their research. It is plausible to say that research in positive psychology is likely of higher quality than research in some related fields, such as on pharmaceutical drugs, because of a lower level of distortion by commercial vested interests.

One of the challenges facing the research field is popular understandings of happiness. Many people think of happiness as the fleeting experience of joy or pleasure, such as when eating an ice cream or laughing at a joke. This is an element of happiness, but researchers are more interested in something deeper, using labels like well-being, life satisfaction and flourishing,<sup>3</sup> often linked to experiences such as engaging in a meaningful relation-

ship, developing an advanced skill or making a contribution to society. This is the sort of thing researchers are after when they ask, "How satisfied are you with your life, overall?" Whether an individual can provide an accurate answer to this question when, recently, they burnt their finger or had an altercation with their best friend is something to be debated. Researchers agonize over such issues, but despite such methodological quandaries, the overall findings from research in the field seem fairly robust.

It is useful to begin with factors that seem to have a relatively low impact on people's life satisfaction. One of these is income and possessions. A classic study of lottery winners found that, only a few months after their wins, their happiness levels were only slightly higher than average.<sup>4</sup> Average life-satisfaction levels across countries such as Britain, Japan and the U.S., as measured by surveys, have stayed much the same over decades despite significantly increased per capita income.<sup>5</sup> On a more personal level, people today have electronic gadgets hardly imaginable to their parents, yet teenagers playing video games do not seem distinctly more satisfied with their activities than their parents or grandparents who had to make do with board games and crossword puzzles.

There is one exception to this pattern: more income makes a difference for those in poverty. But when income is adequate for basic needs, additional income appears to make relatively little difference to life satisfaction.

When people buy a new car, get a promotion or win the lottery,

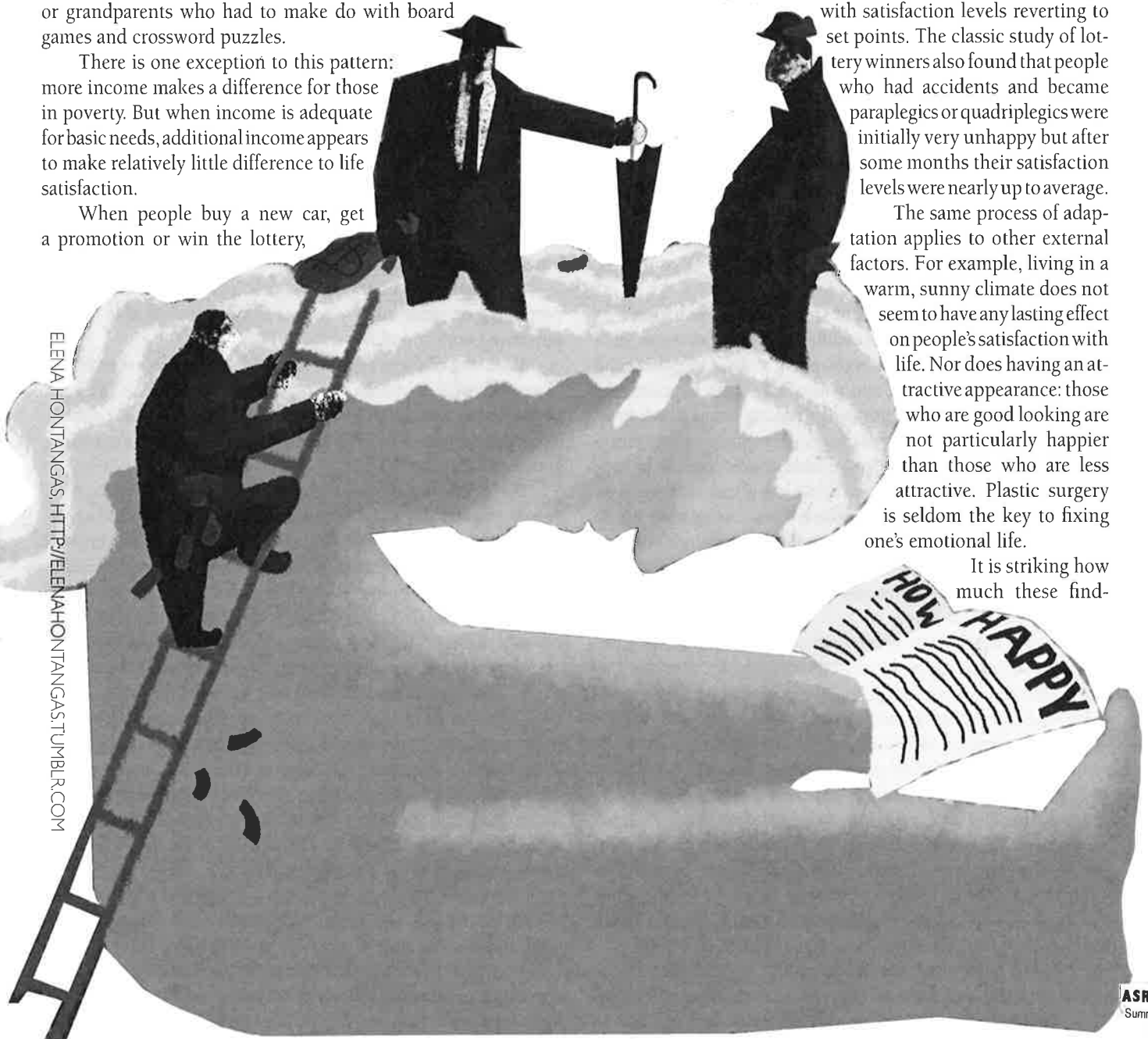
they are initially excited, even elated. What happens next is a process called adaptation: people become habituated to their circumstances; the greater income, larger house or expensive clothes become the norm; and satisfaction levels revert to what they were previously. This occurs with all sorts of material goods, in accord with the adage "Money can't buy happiness." Researchers say each individual has a happiness "set point": external circumstances can cause happiness to go above or below the set point, but after adapting to the circumstances, most people revert to their set point.

Having more money than neighbors or friends does make a difference, due to social comparison. Most people say they would rather make \$50,000 per year when everyone else is making \$25,000 than to make \$100,000 when everyone else is making \$200,000. In other words, dollar increases in the material standard of living don't make as much difference as getting ahead of peers.

The process of adaptation, by which people get used to higher wages and more possessions, also works in reverse: when things become worse, people are dissatisfied at first but then adapt, with satisfaction levels reverting to set points. The classic study of lottery winners also found that people who had accidents and became paraplegics or quadriplegics were initially very unhappy but after some months their satisfaction levels were nearly up to average.

The same process of adaptation applies to other external factors. For example, living in a warm, sunny climate does not seem to have any lasting effect on people's satisfaction with life. Nor does having an attractive appearance: those who are good looking are not particularly happier than those who are less attractive. Plastic surgery is seldom the key to fixing one's emotional life.

It is striking how much these find-



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ings contradict popular opinion. Most people think being promoted, earning more money and owning a new car will make them happier; that's why they put so much effort into getting ahead. Most people think that living in a place like California, with a mild climate, will make them happier than living in the harsher climate of Iowa. The evidence shows that although people know when they are happy, they are very poor at predicting what will make them happy and very poor at judging what made them happy in the past. There are systematic biases in interpreting past experiences and in predicting the results of future ones. Furthermore, most people are slow to learn from experience when it comes to their own well-being. For example, even though previous purchases or previous promotions didn't bring lasting changes in their satisfaction with life, they continue shopping and seeking promotions.

The overall finding is that external conditions of people's lives—such as income, possessions, weather and personal appearance—have at most a modest impact on people's satisfaction with their lives. Note that these findings are statistical. If winning the lottery makes only a small difference on average, it might be that some winners become much happier but, if so, a corresponding number of winners become sadder. The findings apply over the population, not necessarily to every individual.

What then does make a significant contribution to greater well-being? The answer is changes in a person's thinking and behavior. There are quite a number of facets.

**Expressing gratitude** Giving thanks for what one has can make a significant difference in well-being. Experiments show that simply spending a few minutes each week thinking about three things you are grateful for is likely to improve your satisfaction with life.

**Being optimistic** People who are optimistic are happier, on average. This involves a number of different mental processes, such as thinking that when good things happen, more of the same good things are likely to happen, and when bad things happen, they are likely to be temporary. Optimistic thinking can be developed.<sup>6</sup>

**Reducing overthinking** Many people ruminate about things that have happened, such as disagreeable interactions. To be happier, it is helpful to move on and think less about such matters.

**Minimizing social comparison** Comparing yourself to someone who has a lot more money, good looks, friends or sporting skills is a prescription for a bad mood: it draws attention to inadequacies in one's own life and distracts attention from things that make life worth living.

**Helping others** Acts of kindness are beneficial to the giver, providing reliable improvements in satisfaction. Occupations that allow or encourage altruism—the so-called helping professions—are rewarding despite low pay. However, helping others needs to be voluntary and not turned into a routine. For example, people who feel obliged to provide intensive care for a relative with dementia are more likely to experience depression.

**Maintaining and building social relationships** Personal connections with family, friends, co-workers, neighbors, companion animals, acquaintances and strangers are powerful in improving wellbeing. For most people, having strong positive relationships with others, especially with those who are closest, is one of the most important factors in greater satisfaction.

**Coping with adversity** Having skills in resilience in the face of set-backs and personal tragedy can make a big difference. These skills can be practised, so that adversity does not lead to

long-term negative consequences.

**Forgiving** When someone does something personally hurtful, it can be hard to get the sense of injustice off one's mind. Forgiving (not forgetting) improves well-being.

**Experiencing flow** While using a highly developed skill, such as reading, skating, gardening or flying a plane, many people enter a mental state of total absorption called flow.<sup>7</sup> Athletes call it being "in the zone." Sometimes time seems to pass without noticing it. Flow most commonly occurs when the challenge is at the limit of one's abilities, not so great as to cause anxiety but not so low as to lead to boredom. Flow can occur at work as well as leisure pursuits.

**Being mindful** Rather than simply experiencing thoughts and emotions, being mindful is having a part of the mind that sits back and observes the processes in the mind. Mindfulness enables a greater sense of calm and focus. It is an antidote to the continual surge of thoughts and emotions. It is a sort of meditative approach to living.

**Pursuing meaningful goals** Having a purpose in life and continually striving towards it can be deeply satisfying. This means having realistic goals that are personally meaningful, and systematically trying to achieve them.

**Cultivating religiousness or spirituality** A sense of wonder about a greater meaning to the universe—whether derived from an organized religion or from personal spirituality—is associated with greater happiness.

**Savoring** Taking time to experience everyday pleasures, such as feeling a pleasant breeze or eating a meal, is called savoring. It involves deliberate focus. Gobbling down an ice cream gives little opportunity for savoring.

**Exercising** Regularly using one's body, whether walking, swimming or some other vigorous activity, is a reliable way of improving one's mood.

Each one of these areas or approaches has been the subject of considerable research and hence involves complexities far beyond what can be briefly summarized. For example, expressing gratitude once a week can be more effective than expressing gratitude every day.

Not every method mentioned here works for everyone. One person might find it most helpful to foster forgiveness and savoring, whereas another might benefit more from building personal relationships. An important finding is that each person needs to find the happiness-promoting activities that work best for them.<sup>8</sup>

The striking thing about these ways of promoting well-being is how much they depend on thought and behavior and how little they appear, on the surface, to depend on the external environment. This means it is relatively easy to interpret these factors in an individualistic way. For example, a person can seek greater happiness through mindfulness, forgiveness and avoiding social comparison, while doing nothing about inequality and injustice. This is the basis for one critique of positive psychology, namely that it reinforces the status quo by encouraging people to adjust to their circumstances and take responsibility for their emotions while leaving systems of power intact.<sup>9</sup>

It requires only a little reflection to see that the ease with which individuals can pursue happiness-promoting activities depends, to some extent, on their environment. For example, building social relationships is affected by how housing and public spaces are constructed, by whether family and close friends can find work in the same regions of a country, and by communica-

tion technologies. A single parent without child-care support, and with few resources, may find it challenging to exercise or develop skills to experience flow. Changing the way society is organized can make a difference in average life-satisfaction levels.

This is often treated as a matter of public policy, focusing on what governments can or should do.<sup>10</sup> Governments undoubtedly can make a difference, but there are limits to relying on policy change: few governments are likely to make changes that threaten elite power and privilege. Governments might sponsor measurement of well-being indicators or encourage enlightened management, thus giving symbolic endorsement of positive psychology, but are unlikely to sponsor participatory democracy or income levelling.

Furthermore, there is no guarantee that policy based on positive psychology leads in a radical direction. Arthur C. Brooks in his book *Gross National Happiness* draws some conservative policy conclusions from research in the field. For example, he argues that, "America must defend its tradition of religious faith."<sup>11</sup> This is one interpretation of the finding that greater religiousness or spirituality is linked to greater happiness. Brooks has drawn the conclusion to support traditional religious participation at a national level rather than, for example, promoting options for development of personal spirituality or, more radically, promoting Buddhism with its own set of traditions – including mindfulness.

Brooks argues that, "We must look for ways to promote opportunity, not economic equality."<sup>12</sup> This is an interpretation of the research oriented to fostering opportunities for the pursuit of happiness rather than changing a highly unequal economic system.

On the other hand, some researchers and practitioners in the field look beyond the individual and the status quo and see social change as a way of increasing well-being or see happiness research as a tool for social change. The book *Positive Psychology as Social Change* is an outstanding collection of contributions along this line. It includes studies of what positive psychology can offer to help overcome poverty, democratize organizations and promote ecological values, among many other topics. The book shows that quite a few positive psychologists think beyond the individual.<sup>13</sup>

My aim here is to point to radical conclusions that can be drawn from positive psychology, specifically in anarchist directions. This means moving towards a society in which people collectively make the decisions that affect them, and without systems of domination including the state, capitalism, the military and patriarchy. In what can be called radical democracy, people share power: no individual or small group has disproportionate power over others.

Anarchist-oriented conclusions are not the only sorts of conclusions that can be drawn from happiness research, but I think they are logical ones. It is precisely because they are so radical that they haven't been emphasized previously.

### **Implications of happiness research**

As mentioned, researchers have found that, within a particular country, increases in per capita average income seem to make little significant difference to average life-satisfaction levels over periods of decades. However, there is a happiness differential within any given country: those who are at the lowest income levels, in poverty, are less happy than those with modest incomes.

Economists have long recognized that money has a declining marginal utility. An extra dollar has more subjective value for a poor person than a rich one. The logical implication is that to maximise total utility – and life satisfaction – across a society, in-

comes should be much closer to equal. In short, happiness research provides a warrant for greater equality in income and wealth.

This goes against the trend since 1980 for economic inequality to increase, especially in English-speaking countries: due to neoliberal policies, the rich are getting richer far faster than the poor, resulting in ever increasing disparities.<sup>14</sup> This may be one factor limiting increases in well-being across entire countries.

If, for those on adequate incomes, further increments in income have a relatively small impact on wellbeing, the implication is that to increase average life satisfaction, the most important step is to improve the situation of all those who are most disadvantaged. This could be done, for example, by providing accommodation for the homeless and bringing people out of poverty through a guaranteed annual income. This has long been a stated goal of many social democrats, but neoliberalism has made it more remote than before.

Redistributing wealth: wouldn't that make those who are well off quite a bit less happy? Not necessarily, if they understand the psychological pay-off from altruism. As shown by researchers and attested by practice, voluntarily giving away money – or providing other sorts of gifts or assistance – can be far more satisfying than having or making more money.<sup>15</sup>

The combination of equalizing incomes and enabling altruism gives rise to a classic socialist vision, though one never remotely approximated in any state socialist society: "From each according to their ability, to each according to their needs." Exact equality of wealth or other material aspects of life should not be the goal, but rather distribution according to need. If part of the process of distribution involves opportunities for helping others, this will increase overall satisfaction.

Helping others can involve giving money, but it can also mean assisting with relationships, learning and doing tasks in all sorts of circumstances. However, when helping becomes a required part of people's jobs, and highly bureaucratized – as in many educational and welfare systems – much of the satisfaction of giving is limited. As researchers have found, when helping others becomes an obligation and a routine, it is far less satisfying and can feel oppressive. The challenge thus becomes one of designing or developing social arrangements that promote provision according to need, thus maximizing wellbeing in terms of outcomes, while providing ample opportunities for mutual aid, thereby maximizing wellbeing through the process of giving.

Another opportunity for helping is the process of education. In traditional schools, the teacher is the primary helper, treated as the source of both knowledge and authority. Opportunities for helping others can be broadened by peer mentoring, in which learners assist each other, thereby learning more themselves. Used as a principle, the idea of mutual help leads to free schools, in which decisions about learning – both content and process – are made by both teachers and students in a cooperative manner.<sup>16</sup> Much learning happens outside of schools, so the same principles can be applied in all walks of life.

For a satisfying life, a central aspect is having a purpose and making meaningful steps towards achieving it. Those who are able to use their work as a path towards their life goals are said to have a calling: they are making a living doing what they want to

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do anyway. This is far more satisfying than simply having a career, which in turn is more satisfying than having a job, an alienating experience undertaken only to support personal goals achieved outside of paid employment.

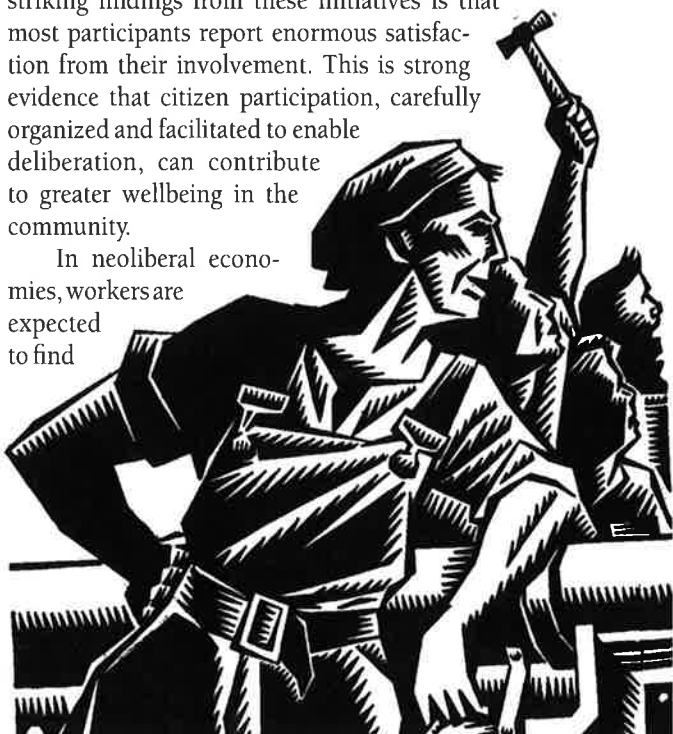
A society geared towards maximizing collective well-being would give as many people as possible opportunities to pursue their callings. One way to do this is to make workplaces more satisfying. When workers have collective control over how they do things, when and how they work, what products are produced and how wages are distributed – in short, how the enterprise is run – their satisfaction is far greater. This is the model of workers' control or workers' self-management, long advocated by anarchists as a goal and method.<sup>17</sup>

With workers' control, managerial tasks are eliminated, shared or rotated among workers: there is much greater participation in decision-making. There is some evidence that greater participation increases happiness within families, workplaces and political systems.<sup>18</sup> Currently, though, a stronger argument for workers' control in relation to well-being is that it gives a greater sense of purpose to workers' lives: working towards a well-defined purpose is vital to wellbeing. So far, happiness researchers have not systematically studied workers in workplaces with different degrees of participation. Furthermore, in many countries, the number of self-managed workplaces is quite limited, with most mainstream companies operating with the usual hierarchical and bureaucratic systems.

One implication is that more social experiments with self-management should be undertaken. Self-managed enterprises could be set up and, when operating smoothly, compared with otherwise similar enterprises that are conventionally run. Learning from such experiments would help fine-tune participation processes to maximise worker wellbeing.

In the past few decades, there have been numerous exercises in citizen participation. Many of these exercises involve groups of citizens chosen randomly from the population, as with criminal juries. Citizen jury members read information, listen to experts and deliberate for days on important policy issues.<sup>19</sup> One of the striking findings from these initiatives is that most participants report enormous satisfaction from their involvement. This is strong evidence that citizen participation, carefully organized and facilitated to enable deliberation, can contribute to greater wellbeing in the community.

In neoliberal economies, workers are expected to find



jobs within the system: individuals adapt to needs of the system rather than the system being adapted to the (non-material) needs of individuals. For example, workers, to obtain a job, often move away from family and friends: the economic system breaks up relationships, even though relationships are vital to most people's life satisfaction. An alternative approach is to design the economic system around people's needs. This might include town planning to reduce commuting time, because for most people commuting gives little satisfaction – unless commuting is by walking or cycling, providing mood-improving benefits from exercise. A human-need-centered economic system would enable people to live near family and friends, or to move away, depending on preferences. It would give opportunities for flow, skill development, variety and helping others.

Mindfulness – being calm, relaxed and aware in the moment, rather than continually distracted and buffeted by irrelevant and disturbing thoughts – contributes to satisfaction with life. Individuals can develop mindfulness: practice is vital. Though individual effort is crucial, the surrounding environment can make mindfulness more or less difficult. Commercialism has filled people's lives with distractions, most obviously advertisements but also all sorts of programmed material designed to capture people's attention. Television has more channels, more information and more rapid changes in image and sound; the Internet is filled with content designed to capture attention; emails, texts and phone calls constantly beckon.

What does this mean for social change? In a world designed to facilitate well-being, people would have choices about the sorts of lives they lead. Some might choose calm and low stimulus; others might choose agitation and high stimulus; many might choose a mixture or sequence. In any case, the style of one's life would be a subject for considerably greater choice: options would be built around people's needs rather than driven by commercialism or job-related demands.

One of the ironies of neoliberalism is that through relentless competition and orientation to economic growth, traditional social institutions, such as the family, communities, churches and career structures, are systematically undermined. In some ways this is liberating, but process also removes traditional sources of meaning – the very thing decried by conservative commentators. People might say they are happy with their lives, but social indicators, such as levels of mental health and chronic disease, suggest people's lives are not as good as they seem on the surface.<sup>20</sup> From an anarchist perspective, unrestrained economic competition is the enemy of self-management. From a positive psychology viewpoint, neoliberalism makes it harder for people to pursue a life with meaning, one of the key elements of well-being.

I've indicated a few implications for how society is organized that can be drawn from positive psychology. As noted previously, the research implications can be drawn in different directions. The usual orientation is to assume that individuals make changes within their circumstances. A minority orientation is for governments to make policy changes. Least developed is the approach of grassroots social change, especially in a direction that challenges current systems of hierarchy, domination and privilege.

### The change process

A common assumption in neoclassical economics is that individuals pursue their self-interest: they try to maximize utility. Most economists advocate measures for fostering economic growth on the grounds that greater income means greater util-

ity. This seems plausible because most people believe that more money is a worthwhile goal and that being rich is a reliable path to happiness. This entire economic approach is undermined by happiness research, which dismisses materialism as the foundation of well-being.

If people knew about positive psychology and used it to pursue life goals, they might put far less effort into earning money and much more into cultivating mindfulness, gratitude, optimism and other tested happiness-promoting habits. But does this mean that everyone would be content to pursue their own personal happiness? How would social change occur in a society driven by the goal of greater well-being, informed by research?

Critics say that seeking happiness is a diversion from the task of social change. Barbara Ehrenreich sees positive psychology as a tool of employers, used to pacify discontent by treating happiness as a personal responsibility.<sup>21</sup> It is certainly possible for individuals to look only at their own situation, using methods such as gratitude and optimism to improve their own mental state and not even thinking about social change.

Historically, some methods of fostering contentment – such as meditation and, more generally, the pursuit of a blissful mental state – have been associated with acceptance of political and social arrangements, as in countries in which Buddhism is dominant. On the other hand, Buddhists can be activists, as shown by protests by monks against the regime in Burma, and by the approach called engaged Buddhism.<sup>22</sup>

Participation in social movements shows that not everyone is self-centered. Some movements are about collective advancement, such as the labor movement, but for individuals concerned only about themselves, there is little incentive to join in, because most of the benefits go to others. The existence of collective action has long vexed some social scientists: why would anyone do something that requires sacrifice and little or no personal return? Even voting seems to be a waste of time, much less risking one's livelihood to join a picket line.

There is a simple answer to this conundrum: altruism.<sup>23</sup> People obtain satisfaction from helping others, as shown through research. Engaging in social activism has several benefits for participants, all shown by research to promote satisfaction with life: they build and develop personal relationships; they develop and practise skills; and they serve a goal wider than themselves.

Activists often are quite serious in what they do. After all, they are dealing with serious topics, like inequality, exploitation, torture and war. Some groups emphasize “doom and gloom.” Climate change campaigners regularly recount the disasters that await should greenhouse gas emissions not be controlled. Opponents of nuclear weapons have long described the horrendous consequences of nuclear war. Although the topics are serious, it is not obligatory for campaigning itself to be relentlessly negative.

An alternative approach is what might be called “happy activism.”<sup>24</sup> It involves bringing a spirit of fun and optimism to activism. Some do this already, organizing humorous protests as a way of challenging oppression. For example, in the late 1990s, opponents of Serbian ruler Slobodan Milosevic, especially the movement Otpor, organized numerous amusing stunts.<sup>25</sup>

As well as humor in campaigning, it is possible to make meetings and other activities more engaging. Using ideas from research, it is sensible to design activities to build relationships, involve expressions of gratitude, enable participants to help each other, and a number of other techniques, all of which have been

shown to increase satisfaction.

Capitalists have adopted some findings from positive psychology to make workers more satisfied with their jobs. However, this requires being selective in using the research. Activist groups and activities more easily provide a basis for greater well-being. It's worth looking at several features of activism that can make a difference: purpose, participation and equality.

Activists typically seek to serve a purpose greater than themselves, often involving service to others or to a cause. Environmentalists, for example, push for cleaner water, protection of species, and a host of other goals with collective benefits rather than individual payoffs. Climate change campaigners seek changes in energy systems that will benefit future generations worldwide, with little or no personal advantage in the near term. Pursuing a larger purpose is an important basis for greater life satisfaction, and is more easily achieved by activists than by campaigners for special interests, such as mining or tobacco companies.

Activist groups and campaigns that allow greater participation in decision making are more likely to foster satisfaction among participants. Participation itself is satisfying, giving a greater sense of community involvement, and contributes to meaningfulness, a central component of wellbeing.

Some activist groups are based on a presumption of equality, especially groups without formal hierarchy that make decisions by consensus, namely the groups with an anarchist ethos, whether explicitly anarchist or not. The more egalitarian groups foster a sense of engagement, with a greater potential for building deep, mutually supportive relationships. These are key elements in promoting happiness. It is reasonable to say that happy activism is more easily achieved in groups built around mutual support and equality.

Is there a limit to happy activism? If activists are always focused on having a good time, maybe they won't take analysis and planning seriously enough and as a result be less effective. There will always be a place for critical scrutiny of options, preparation for worst-case scenarios, and level-headed assessment of problems – and a joyous mood may not be the best mental space for undertaking such vital activities.<sup>26</sup> However, few groups are in danger of being too happy. Excess negativity, pessimism and burnout are more serious risks. Most activists are sensible enough to be able to draw helpful ideas from positive psychology while not going overboard.

## Conclusion

Researchers have found that a range of factors, such as gratitude, optimism and altruism, can contribute to greater human well-being. The primary way these findings have been interpreted is as guidelines for individual thought and behavior. A secondary approach is to use the findings as input into government policy-making. Largely left off the agenda is a radical interpretation of the findings, as indicating goals for social change and methods for pursuing it. Most of the findings are entirely compatible with anarchist principles of self-management. Activists have much to gain by incorporating happiness research findings into the operation of their groups, their campaigning and their goals.

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*An  
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## FAU waiters strike in Dresden

BY JOHN KALWAIC

The gastronomy section of the FAU has been fighting to get workers reinstated at the *Trotzdem* club in Dresden, Germany. The workers worked for a trendy leftist club, which fired many of the waiters for unionizing with the anarcho-syndicalist FAU. The employees of the club formed a workplace group in May 2013, quickly persuading the bosses to agree to a 20% pay increase. The waiters then formed the BNG-FAU (Gastronomy and Nutrition Section of the FAU) in July 2013. In January half of the waiters of the club were suddenly fired. When an owner refused to negotiate, the rest of the workers went on strike.

Business at the club has declined dramatically due to solidarity from many customers. Mainstream unions have only a few shops in some of the bigger clubs. Strikes in the sector are rare, and the BNG-FAU has gotten a lot of attention in Dresden and nationally.

## Syndicalist beaten in Italy

Syndicalist Fabio Zerbini was brutally beaten Jan. 14 in Milan. Zerbini is a coordinator for the SI Cobas base union, which is organizing warehouse workers in Northern Italy's industrial sector. The warehouses are bastions of exploitation that often have ties to the Mafia. A few days before the beating Zerbini had his car's rearview mirror broken in the car and found a note requesting a meeting to "repay the damage." At this meeting the two men who later beat him told him that if the workers continue to strike, "you will come to a bad end."

## Chinese protest against chemical plant

In Maoming, in southern China's Guangdong province, nearly 10,000 people took to the streets March 30 to protest a new chemical plant known as the PX. Protesters are concerned about health and safety standards. Junior high school students were "advised" by their teachers to sign a petition in support of the plant; instead they joined the demonstration against the PX along with many local factory workers. Local newspapers denounced the protests, saying they threatened to "disrupt social order," and riot police harassed demonstrating residents.