

VIEWS ON HAPPINESS IN EARLY SOCIOLOGY.

Introduction to this special issue

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INTRODUCTION

One of the aims of this journal is to portray historical ideas on happiness and to place these in their social and intellectual context. A related aim is to confront earlier reflective thought with the results of present day empirical research. These objectives were presented in the editorial statement to the inaugural issue.

The history of ideas on happiness is one of the main subjects of the German 'Institut für Glücksforschung' (Institute for happiness research). This institute was founded in the early 1990s by Alfred Bellebaum, emeritus professor of sociology of Bonn University and Koblenz University.

The Institut für Glücksforschung organizes seminars on intellectual traditions, in which specialists highlight contiguous thought on happiness. Several of these seminars have resulted in books, all in the German language. In this issue that work is opened for English readers. A selection from one of the books is presented in this special issue (Bellebaum & Barheier 1997). Four other books are summarized in the review section: Bellebaum (1994), Bellebaum, Braun & Gross (1998), Bellebaum & Niederschlag (1999) and Bellebaum, Schaaff & Zinn (1999).

Most literature on the history of ideas on happiness deals with ancient Greek philosophy and with West-European enlightened thought. This issue brings a tradition into the picture that is less known. The focus is on happiness in early sociology. Sociology came forth from social philosophy by the end of the 19th century and became established in the first half of the 20th century. The founding fathers of sociology were more concerned with the issue of happiness than most modern sociologists know.

This issue starts with an article on the French forerunner Auguste Comte (1798-1857), who introduced the terms 'sociology' and 'positivism' into science. Bernard Ple positions his notion of happiness in the context of his wider views on science and social progress. Then follows a contribution on another Frenchman, Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), who was the first professor in sociology. Gerhardt Vowinckel shows how Durkheim's ideas on happiness fit his moralistic thought. Next the work of German sociologist Georg Simmel (1858-1918) is considered.

Arnold Zwingerle follows the development of his notions about happiness over time. Finally we meet with German philosophical anthropology during the first half of the 20th century. Karl-Siegbert Rehberg describes the fear of happiness in that tradition.

Though there are obviously more sociologists who have considered happiness, these few authors provide a good sample of views. Still, a contribution on Herbert Spencer would have been suitable. I welcome a review of his thoughts on happiness for a later issue of JOHS.

This retrospective view on happiness in early sociology brings several interesting things to light: First of all it is telling us about early sociology. In its beginning sociology was clearly less empirical and technocratic a science than it is today. The first sociologists were primarily moral missionaries. Though they also paved the way for a scientific approach, their analysis mixes with their message.

Secondly, it is interesting to see how much views on happiness depended on the view of the social problems of the time. In spite of rhetoric about functional universals, the analysis appears to be rather time and place bound. It is also remarkable how much opinion differed on the possibility of mass happiness and on the desirability of that. Seen in that light current discensus might have been worse.

Lastly we see many of the problems which still plague present day quality-of-life research: the conceptual ambiguities, the ambivalence about subjective enjoyment and the heavy moral undertone.

Given the limitations of early sociologists it is noteworthy that much of their intuitions are confirmed by the results of current empirical research. Wolfgang Glatzer shows this in the epilog. Yet on some points some classics were wrong, in particular in the hunch that modernization of society comes at the expense of the happiness of people.

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