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# The Happiness Experts — What Do they Know?

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Frank Feredi, a leftist academic in Britain (Professor of Sociology, University of Kent), has had enough of the happiness experts. His essays are usually controversial, and I do not often find myself in enthusiastic agreement with his analysis. Nevertheless, he is right on the mark with his judgment that the professional “happiness experts” are all wet.

From his essay:

*Policies that are designed to make us happy have little to do with a genuine emotional response to our experience. They attempt to persuade the public to think positively and adopt forms of behaviour deemed appropriate by enlightened “experts”. Like Happy Meals, happiness has been turned into an easily digestible formula that can be taught by teachers, learned by the masses and managed by policy makers.*

*Happiness entrepreneurs even claim that their project is based on hard science, that they are able to measure the impact of government policies on people’s happiness. By transforming intangible feelings into statistics, it has become an object of policy making. Back in 2002, the Prime Minister’s Strategy Unit explored the potential for promoting “happiness policies” at a “life satisfaction seminar”. At present, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is working on a happiness index. Some argue that happiness statistics reveal more about the life of a nation than figures that measure GDP or productivity.*

It seems that the current government in Britain wants to push happiness as its next “Big Idea.” Now, education is being packaged as the way to happiness, and happiness is the new goal of the new curriculum. More:

*The ascendancy of therapeutic education is not confined to the state sector. Anthony Seldon, the headmaster of Wellington College, hopes to turn his school into a very happy place. He has teamed up with the Orwellian sounding “Well-being Institute” of Cambridge University to produce happy children. He writes that producing “happy young adults is my highest priority as head”. Excellence and high achievement? Umm. Seldon castigates “driven people” who are “missing the point of life.*

Further:

*People have always pursued happiness. Policy makers have always hoped their initiatives would make people happy. But happiness was not seen as an end in itself. Teachers hoped that their students would be happy with their experience but did not set out to teach their pupils how to be happy. Those charged with moral education were devoted to explaining the difference between good and bad but not to instructing children how to feel.*

*Today’s turn towards the management of people’s internal life is motivated by moral disorientation and political exhaustion. Unimaginative politicians who are unable to decide what needs to be done - or implement the appropriate policies - feel more comfortable with instructing the public how it should feel.*

Finally:

*In reality, neither experts nor clever policies can make people genuinely happy. Freud may have been a little cynical when he suggested that his objective was to “convert neurotic misery into ordinary unhappiness”. But he understood that*

*true happiness was an ideal that we pursue but rarely achieve. Nor is that a problem. A good life is not always a happy one. People are often justified in being unhappy about their circumstances and surroundings. Discontent and ambition have driven humanity to confront and overcome the challenges they faced. That is why people like the Controller in Brave New World want us live on a diet of “feelies” and “scent organs”. That is also why we should be suspicious of experts who seek to colonise our internal life.*

Furedi makes an essential point here — and it is one we should note with great interest. Happiness has its limits, as all real adults eventually come to understand.

The Christian worldview does not prize happiness highly. Contentment is the Christian’s calling, and contentment does not mean what the world calls happiness.

So, be warned by Professor Furedi. Beware those who would push “feelies” and “scent organs” — or the latest therapeutic swill of the day.

His essay, “Politicians, Economists, Teachers . . . Why Are They So Desperate To Make Us Happy?”, was published in the May 7, 2006 edition of *The Telegraph* [London].

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