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## *Hans in Luck* or the moral economy of happiness in the modern age

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### ABSTRACT


Generations of men and women since antiquity have been preoccupied with the difficult quest for happiness. Up until modernity, people relied on the gods or God to grant them happiness. In the course of the eighteenth century, happiness became both a secular promise and a moral-political claim relevant to all people. The fairy tale *Hans im Glück* (Hans in Luck), published by the Grimm brothers in the early nineteenth century, and discussed in this article, provides a telling example of a quest for happiness unconcerned with moral prescriptions and social conventions, in which the hero focuses on his own feelings. Two centuries later, modern men and women find themselves in a predicament. Happiness still tops their private wish list but it seems harder than ever to achieve it, with abundant confusion as to what real happiness feels like. Subjective well-being tends to be distinguished from notions of happiness associated with serene bliss and fulfilment, beyond the limits of modern consumer society. Happiness has been defined as ‘people’s perception of the meaningfulness, sense of purpose, and value of their lives’, thus reintroducing morality and higher principles without, however, excluding hedonistic Hans-in-Luck style choices.

### KEYWORDS

Happiness; Hans in Luck; Grimm brothers; Kant; history of concepts

Happiness is not a modern concept. It has existed in various languages and semantic systems for a long time. The quest for happiness, together with the knowledge that it was difficult to achieve and maintain, has exercised generations of men and women since antiquity. Classical poets and philosophers thought and wrote about it, as did medieval and Renaissance authors. They dwelt on the precarious combination of felicity and chance/luck/fortune inherent in most Indo-European languages, and concluded that a person is basically unable to be the master of his or her own happiness. As a consequence, they stressed the importance of moral intentions, virtue, and/or ritual practices in order for the gods, or God, to look mercifully upon humans and generously grant them what they desired most: the state and feeling of happiness.<sup>1</sup>

Modernity, however, put an end to man’s dependence on God’s unfathomable will. Since the eighteenth century, happiness has become both a secular promise and a moral-political claim relevant to all people, regardless of age, gender, class, religion, and nationality. In the Age of Enlightenment, man seemed to be his own creator and society his enabler. Modern revolutions heralded an age of happiness for everyone, and proclaimed the end of misery as the old structures of power and

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<sup>1</sup>Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Darrin M. McMahon, *Happiness: A History* (New York: Grove Press, 2006), 19–139.

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morality were overthrown. The new men and women forged through the events of 1776, 1789, 1848, or 1917 would enjoy utmost happiness in the societies built from scratch by the revolutionaries. Happiness for every citizen became the battle cry for political change. Even those who preferred liberal reform to revolutionary violence made a pledge of general happiness: Jeremy Bentham, for instance, who famously considered the ‘greatest happiness of the greatest number’ as ‘the foundation of morals and legislation’.<sup>2</sup>

In today’s world, happiness has become the gold standard of well-being. Although framed in individualistic terms, as a matter of a person’s own expectations and decisions, in recent years it has captured the attention of social scientists and politicians. In their hands and through their eyes, happiness has become a benchmark against which social trust and good governance can be evaluated. When social scientists set out to measure people’s happiness they also compare it internationally, ranking countries whose citizens report high or low levels of subjective well-being. Such testimonies are then linked to objective variables such as material wealth, personal security, and social solidarity. Since 2012, the United Nations has regularly published its ‘World Happiness Reports’, in which Northern European countries like Norway, Denmark, Iceland, Finland, and Sweden usually rank top, followed by Australia, New Zealand, and Canada. In 2016, the OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) decided ‘to redefine the growth narrative to put people’s well-being at the center of governments’ efforts’.<sup>3</sup>

It followed the example of Bhutan, a tiny kingdom in the Himalayas and one of the poorest countries in the world, whose ruler coined the term ‘Gross National Happiness’ in order both to divert attention from Bhutan’s economic backwardness and protect its Buddhist traditions and political structures. Instead of focusing exclusively on levels of income and investment, development should be perceived in a broader sense. GNH, as defined by the country’s 2008 constitution, rests on four pillars: good governance, sustainable socioeconomic development, preservation and promotion of culture, and environmental conservation.<sup>4</sup>

In this framing happiness seems both an appropriate and unconventional tool for evaluating development beyond the usual focus on gross domestic product. On the one hand, it reflects the voice of citizens as a major determinant of what is at stake and, in doing so, feeds into the Western interest in first-person accounts and subjectivities. On the other hand, it reintroduces a moral dimension into what had hitherto been represented as a purely financial equation. Objective and subjective well-being, so traditional economics have assumed, increase with the level of available income. Growth rates and per capita income served as yardsticks to measure progress and, for this matter, happiness. Behavioural economists more recently called this into question and provided empirical data that complicated the correlation.<sup>5</sup> Researchers have also drawn attention to what Paul Dolan has called ‘purpose’. In Dolan’s view, what people experience (and report) as happiness is highly affected by whether they think that they have done something meaningful.<sup>6</sup> This resonates with what the president of the Center for Bhutan Studies and GNH Research, Dasho Karma Ura, said about the nature of happiness: ‘People feel happy when they see something ethical’ or ‘have done something right and brave and courageous’ that has reinstated them as a ‘meaningful actor’.<sup>7</sup>

This is by no means a new insight. As early as 1838, John Stuart Mill criticized Bentham’s reductionist views on human nature and desire. People, he argued, were not exclusively driven by utility calculation and material interest. What might hold true in business relations ignored the reality of other social arrangements and human affairs. Moral and emotional influences were not to be

<sup>2</sup>J.H. Burns, ‘Happiness and Utility: Jeremy Bentham’s Equation’, *Utilitas* 17 (2005): 46–61.

<sup>3</sup><http://worldhappiness.report/ed/2017/> (accessed May 30, 2017).

<sup>4</sup><https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/17/world/asia/bhutan-gross-national-happiness-indicator.html>; <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/dec/01/bhutan-wealth-happiness-counts> (accessed May 30, 2017).

<sup>5</sup>Bruno S. Frey and Alois Stutzer, *Happiness and Economics: How the Economy and Institutions Affect Well-Being* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); Bruno S. Frey, *Happiness: A Revolution in Economics* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008). See also Robert Skidelsky and Edward Skidelsky, *How Much is Enough? Money and the Good Life* (New York: Other Press, 2012), esp. ch. 4.

<sup>6</sup>Paul Dolan, *Happiness by Design: Change What You Do, Not How You Think* (New York: Hudson Street Press, 2014).

<sup>7</sup><https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/17/world/asia/bhutan-gross-national-happiness-indicator.html> (accessed May 30, 2017).

underestimated. In contrast to Bentham, Mill held ‘man’ to be a ‘most complex being’, driven by far more factors than personal utility and an increase in material comforts. Instead, he considered him as actuated by other ideals, ‘the sense of *honour*, and personal dignity’ among them, as well as ‘the love of beauty’, order, power, and action.<sup>8</sup> Behaviour was not necessarily dictated by egoism and self-love, but also by motives of altruism, compassion, fairness, and civility, as Mill’s German contemporary Arthur Schopenhauer contended in 1840. How else could one explain – so ran Schopenhauer’s rhetorical question – all those contemporary movements and associations that untiringly campaigned for the abolition of slavery and fought the violence inflicted upon children, animals, prisoners, etc.? In those cases, morality had a ‘direct and immediate influence’ upon happiness.<sup>9</sup> Acting on behalf of less fortunate beings obviously induced a feeling of happiness and serenity. Purposeful moral action gave people personal pleasure, even if the action itself was far from pleasurable.

Happiness thus preserved the moral dimension that reached back to the pre-Enlightenment era and its thoroughly religious substance. Even during and after the Enlightenment, happiness maintained those links. Closely tied to notions of virtue and decency, it was not to be achieved without a strong commitment to being a good person, living in harmony with moral and civic laws. But even such harmony could not guarantee happiness. As Immanuel Kant famously stated in 1784, human beings were not made to live the life of Arcadian shepherds, ‘with all its concord, contentment, and mutual affection’. Although man ‘wishes to live comfortably and pleasantly’, his nature of ‘unsocial sociability’ compels him to turn ‘sloth and passive contentment into labor and trouble’ and thus develop his capacities. According to Kant, individual life and human history were governed by the natural forces of opposition and discord. Happiness therefore was a matter of hope and no part of nature’s plan. If at all, men could and should strive, by obeying the categorical imperative and working on their self-perfection, to render themselves ‘worthy of happiness’.<sup>10</sup>

Kant’s teachings became enormously influential during the nineteenth century, especially in Germany. His duty ethics were enshrined in school curricula and academic syllabi. Otto von Bismarck’s 1851 sigh (in a melancholic letter to his wife) ‘We are not in this world in order to be happy and to enjoy ourselves but to fulfil our duty’ was quoted time and again and immortalized, as a motto, in innumerable friendship and autograph books.<sup>11</sup> But Central Europe, with its strong tradition of public service and obligation to the state as the guarantor of the common good, was not alone in embracing non-utilitarian and non-hedonistic norms and ideas. As Mill’s critique of Bentham has shown, even the Anglo-Saxon world did not unequivocally accept the maximization of individual utility and pleasure as a valid standard of social conduct. On the continent, the French liberal thinker Benjamin Constant explicitly disavowed happiness as the only and ultimate goal of mankind. Similarly to Kant, he referred to ‘the better part of our nature, that noble disquiet which pursues and torments us, that desire to broaden our knowledge and develop our faculties. It is not happiness alone, it is to self-development that our destiny calls us’.<sup>12</sup>

## II

Reviewing the multiple reflections on happiness voiced during the modern period, three caveats come to mind. First, these thoughts and musings emanated from a small number of intellectuals, mostly philosophers. Beyond the names already mentioned, many more joined the debate, giving

<sup>8</sup>John Stuart Mill, ‘Bentham’, *The London and Westminster Review* (August 1838): 467–506, quotes 486, 490.

<sup>9</sup>Arthur Schopenhauer, *On the Basis of Morality*, trans. Arthur Brodrick Bullock (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1903), 277, 279, *passim*; idem, *The Wisdom of Life and other Essays*, trans. Bailey Saunders and Ernest Belfort Bax (Washington: Dunne, 1901), 35.

<sup>10</sup>Immanuel Kant, ‘Idea of a Universal History on a Cosmo-Political Plan’, *The London Magazine* 10 (July–December 1824): 385–93, here 387 (Proposition the Fourth); idem, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1996), 736 f.

<sup>11</sup>*Fürst Bismarcks Briefe an seine Braut und Gattin*, ed. Herbert Bismarck, 4th ed. (Stuttgart/Berlin: Cotta, 1914), 264–7, quote 264. See also Ute Frevert, ‘Pflicht’, in *Deutsche Erinnerungsorte*, eds. Étienne François and Hagen Schulze, vol. 2 (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2001), 269–85.

<sup>12</sup>Benjamin Constant, ‘The Liberty of the Ancients Compared with that of the Moderns (1819)’, in idem, *Political Writings*, ed. Biancamaria Fontana (Cambridge: CUP, 1988), 327.

it further nuance and diversity.<sup>13</sup> Second, all authors who wrote about happiness were highbrows who loved to engage with each other in an ongoing intertextual dialogue. The extent to which their arguments ever left the closed circuit of learned or academic discourse is hardly known. Even if some managed to build a reputation beyond academia and were able to shape educational programmes and political discourse, as Kant did through his many followers, they can hardly be considered representative of everyone's feelings about what happiness was and why it mattered.

This does not mean that there was no relation at all between low and high, popular and elite. The more a certain notion of happiness was reiterated – in the family, in school, church etc. –, the more likely it was that ordinary people would adopt and integrate it into their own mindset and worldview in some fashion. People are not born with moral norms and emotions; instead, from an early age they are taught to take them for granted. To write a history of happiness would therefore entail digging deep into educational and religious practices and reconstructing, through media like prayer books, fables, family journals, advice manuals, popular songs, political anthems, party programmes, etc., people's expectations of what happiness was supposed to be, how it should feel, be achieved and maintained.

Third, such an endeavour would have to pay attention to differences in social class, age, and gender, as much as it would have to take into account cultural and linguistic variations. How happiness is defined, in a broader or narrower sense, as a thin or a thick concept, bears consequences on how people use the term and in what circumstances. In today's English-speaking world, happiness is generally understood as a thin concept, as in 'I am happy to be here' or 'I am happy to draft this article for a journal'. In German, *glücklich sein* carries a far stronger meaning. It comes with moral baggage and a kind of exuberance that defies generalization and normalization. Furthermore, the German language does not distinguish between *Glück* as fortune or luck, and *Glück* as a state of happy being. In the eighteenth century, people still chose to separate *Glück* from *Glückseligkeit*. *Glück (fortuna)* – which shares its linguistic roots with the Lower Saxon and English *luck*, the Swedish *Lycka* and the Danish *Lykke* – referred to incidents that could neither be predicted nor controlled by man. *Glückseligkeit (felicitas)*, by contrast, was perceived as a state of lasting joy (*Freude*).<sup>14</sup> Such semantic distinctions, however, did not survive. *Glückseligkeit* fell into disuse during the nineteenth century, burdening *Glück* with an ambiguity that other languages managed to avoid.

What also disappeared was the eighteenth-century attempt to link *Glück* as *fortuna* to moral values and higher principles. In 1788, Krünitz' Encyclopedia stressed the fact that luck indeed occurred without man's active participation, but that it was nevertheless not completely accidental. Instead, according to Christian belief, *Glück* lay in the hands of a superior power and was granted by God's special providence. Since man was not in a position to influence such providence, his only option was to pray, work, and put his full trust in God.<sup>15</sup> Within such a moral economy, God might benevolently and generously pay him back, grant him luck and even allow him to experience true happiness/*Glückseligkeit*.

### III

A telling example of this moral economy is the fairy tale *Hans im Glück* (Hans in Luck), published by the Grimm brothers in the early nineteenth century. Until the present, the tale has been a part of people's collective memory, forged by bedside readings and the continuous popularity of the Grimm collection, despite an ever-growing corpus of children's literature. Translated into many languages, the tales still find ardent fans and followers, although they seem to have less and less to do with the realities of modern life.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup>For a wider, although far from complete panorama of authors, see McMahon, *Happiness*.

<sup>14</sup>Johann Georg Krünitz, *Oekonomische Encyklopädie*, vol. 19 (Berlin: Pauli, 1788), 205–10, 222–32. (<http://www.kruenitz1.uni-trier.de/>)

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, 208f.

<sup>16</sup>Hans-Jörg Uther, 'Hans im Glück (KHM 83): Zur Entstehung, Verbreitung und bildlichen Darstellung eines populären Märchens', in *The Telling of Stories: Approaches to a Traditional Craft*, eds. Morten Nøjgaard et al. (Odense: Odense University Press, 1990), 119–64.

At first glance, this also pertains to ‘Hans in Luck’, a tale which can be read as a late document of a traditional society on the verge of disappearance. This was a society organized in temporal cycles and structured by processes of economic exchange that were basically non-monetary. The bartering of goods and services followed principles of individual utility that, in certain cases, might diverge greatly from ‘real’ material worth. This is how it plays out with Hans, a young man who has served seven years as the apprentice and helping hand of a master in an unknown trade. He has the choice to stay on, since the master is highly satisfied with his work and conduct. But Hans longs to go home and be with his mother whom he has not seen for a long time. When he leaves his job, his master pays him a huge amount of gold, enough to make his fortune. Tiring on his journey, however, Hans soon exchanges the gold with a horse. He then becomes dissatisfied with the horse and trades it for a cow. This continues until Hans is left with nothing but a ‘light and merry heart’.

Hans indeed feels happy and vividly expresses it: “How happy am I!” cried he: “no mortal was ever so lucky as I am”. His various desires have all been satisfied, and, although what he desired possessed less and less material value, every single wish was fulfilled and gave him pleasure. Such pleasure can not last, to be sure. Nevertheless, Hans is convinced that he has made a profitable deal and got the best out of it.<sup>17</sup>

In the tale’s 1823 English translation, happy Hans was turned into lucky Hans, or *Hans in Luck*. This might be interpreted as a deliberate critique and revision of the original. The translator obviously did not believe that Hans was happy, but chose to present his adventures as a series of lucky incidents, in the sense of *fortuna*. This was not altogether a misrepresentation of the tale. Hans indeed considers himself lucky to have met all those seemingly generous men who have talked him into trading valuable for less valuable goods. At the same time, however, they have all contributed to his growing happiness, which reaches its peak after he, accidentally, drops his last possession, a grindstone, into a deep river, thus thwarting any chance of starting his ‘golden trade’ and financially securing his happiness. As a person Hans experiences happiness more than luck. He is even driven by the search for happiness and *Seelenfreude*, joy of mind, as the Grimm brothers phrase it. While accident and luck do play a role in making him cross paths with the owners of the horse, the cow, the pig, the goose, and the grindstone, he feels utterly happy about these exchanges. Each transaction greatly enhances his subjective happiness.

This was clearly at odds with conventional opinion around 1800. Even in a pre-capitalist economy, in which most people hardly achieved more than subsistence, Hans’ choices would have aroused irritation. One could, of course, choose poverty over riches, as did Franciscan monks, who traditionally enjoyed a high social reputation. One could also give money to the poor, in obedience to both religious and secular norms of charity. But it was hardly possible to find any virtue or positive morality in Hans’ transactions. They served the greed of those who tricked him, and were based on fraud and delusion. Furthermore, they left him where he had started seven years earlier: without any means to support himself and his aging mother, and without any savings to set up his own household and family.

Such a judgement, however, fails to take into account what the tale is all about: happiness, rather than luck. The story leaves us in no doubt that Hans’ subjective feelings go beyond economic concerns. His happiness is not based on abstract material values, but reflects the pleasure he receives from concrete consumption: riding a horse instead of going on foot, expecting milk and cheese from a cow, bacon and ham from a pig. In the long run, these purchases leave him empty-handed; in the short run, they make him happy, and this is what he desires most. In this regard, he both embodies and opposes the credo of the modern world. He is never content with what he possesses but wants to increase his happiness, thus acting in line with Thomas Hobbes’ definition of felicity as the ‘continuall successe in obtaining those things which a man from time to time desireth, that is to

<sup>17</sup>*German Popular Stories*, trans. from the *Kinder und Haus-Märchen*, collected by M.M. Grimm (London: C. Baldwin, 1823), 1–9, quote 9. ‘Hans in Luck’ was the first story printed in that volume.



say, continually prospering'.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, Hans' continuous prospering takes place only in his imagination and emotional experience, since each successive purchase has less and less material value.

Hans is clearly not yet a citizen of the modern world who pursues the capitalist ideal of accumulating more and more riches with every investment. The goods that he desires are not selected according to their exchange value, but their subjective utility, which Hans defines on the spot, without long-term reflection and calculation. Yet his decisions to sell and buy are not wholly spontaneous and hedonistic; they do serve an ultimate goal which goes beyond selfish concerns: What matters most to Hans is that he reaches home as fast as possible to embrace his mother, which will make both happy.

Such behaviour seems more in keeping with a premodern, pre-capitalist order that knows and cares little about individual advancement and social mobility. Instead, its moral economy is organized in a circular and reciprocal way that takes into account different kinds of utilities and leaves room for moral commitments to God and kin. In such an economy, material possessions are not all that counts, and their value might diminish quickly, depending on unforeseen and unforeseeable circumstances. Considering the contingencies of the environment, it might even be rational to forego any riches and rely on what is of real value: personal relations, and the obligation of a son to take care of his mother. Material wealth might help, but cannot be relied upon. Even without gold or grindstone, Hans, as a young and healthy man, could start anew and make his fortune, while at the same time showering his mother with filial love and comfort. Calculating and planning the future might be futile anyway, since the future cannot be foreseen, planned or commanded. It seems far better and more sensible to insist on present-day happiness and to try to sustain it, by maintaining optimism and trust in God. Hans is free to choose optimism over pessimism, hope over fear, trust over distrust. He uses his freedom to achieve happiness.

#### IV

How did children and adults read this fairy tale? Did they take Hans to be a simpleton whose actions were to be ridiculed and ignored? Or did they envy him because finally, after seven years of strenuous work and dependence, he indulged his temporary freedom to take his life into his own hands and decide what was good for him and made him happy? Did they see Hans as a radical dropout, an 'anti-hero' and 'archetypical fool'?<sup>19</sup> Did they appreciate his wish to return to his mother as soon as possible and give up everything he once owned? How did they think his mother reacted when her son returned, happy but empty-handed? Did Hans strike them as the antipode of modern possessive individualism and an inhabitant of an older, quickly disappearing world, organized by altogether different moral economies?

Unfortunately, we know next to nothing about how the tale was received. What seems clear, however, is that it was not part of traditional folk wisdom. 'Hans im Glück' was first published in a journal in 1818 by the young classicist August Eduard Wernicke who pretended, however, that it came 'aus dem Munde des Volkes' – 'out of the mouth of the people'. Wernicke framed the story as a moral lesson, placing great emphasis on the connection between Hans' lack of calculation and his ensuing poverty. When a year later, Wilhelm Grimm included the tale in the later famous collection of fairy tales, he did not fully endorse such criticism. Instead, he painted Hans in much lighter colours, as an amiable fellow, who, without harming anybody, somewhat naively and spontaneously chooses to follow his own desires. In this version, Hans in Luck came to rank among the dozen favourite Grimms' tales and was reprinted time and again, either as part of the Grimm's collection or on its own. It was

<sup>18</sup>Hobbes's *Leviathan*. Reprint from the edition of 1651, with an essay by the late W.G. Pogson Smith (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962), 48.

<sup>19</sup>María Tatar, *The Hard Facts of the Grimms' Fairy Tales* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 100f. As to the Grimms' overall reception, see *The Reception of Grimms' Fairy Tales: Responses, Reactions, Revisions*, ed. Donald Haase (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993).

also published with various illustrations, the first by George Cruikshank in 1823. In these illustrations, Hans is usually depicted as a happy person whose body language and gestures clearly demonstrate the joy he feels bartering his riches.<sup>20</sup>

Such visual representations invite an analysis of Hans' search for *Seelenfreude* as an early comment on the general history of happiness as it evolved during the modern era – one that both reflects and relativizes conventional values and lifestyles. It can be perceived partly as an affirmation of middle-class mores and practices, but also as subversive criticism.

For Hans' contemporaries, his obsession with happiness would not have come as a surprise. Happiness was in the air; already during the eighteenth century a huge number of books, articles, songs, and plays focused on this very theme. In German-speaking countries, the quest for *Glückseligkeit* reached its peak between 1780 and 1810, with moral lectures, sermons, comedies, and advice manuals suggesting the best and most successful ways of being happy. Even catechisms for children changed their traditional structure and, instead of starting with a list of commands and prohibitions, they addressed their young readers' feelings and experiences of felicity.<sup>21</sup> In France, Voltaire and Diderot declared that being happy was the first and foremost need and the only human duty. The American Declaration of Independence proclaimed people's inalienable right not only to life and liberty but also to the 'pursuit of Happiness'. This was very much in line with the general trend to emphasize the individual person and his (rather than her) quest for subjective and objective well-being. In the eyes of the Founding Fathers it was clearly not sufficient to promise and grant people personal safety and the freedom to acquire, possess, and use property. They should also be able to pursue happiness, whatever that meant for them. Nobody could ensure, of course, that happiness would ever be achieved. What mattered was that the road to happiness was open for anyone to take, as it was for Hans. All formal obstacles were to be removed – which meant, above all, that the state should refrain from interfering in people's lives.<sup>22</sup>

What is also striking is that both French philosophers and American Founding Fathers firmly located happiness in the individual man and citizen. He alone was the one who decided on which kind of happiness to pursue, and there was no suggestion that these decisions had to be morally framed or restricted. A person should seek happiness for his or her own sake, independent of social institutions. What mattered most was his or her subjective feelings, his or her own state of mind and *Seelenfreude*. Such radical individualization of happiness was not only consistent with the Enlightenment stress on man's ability to think and reason by himself, without being brainwashed by religion, superstition, or politics. It also went hand in hand with the new interest in, and praise for, feelings and sensibility.

The pursuit of happiness came with two political options. For proponents of enlightened absolutist rule, like Christian Wolff, an influential professor at Halle University in the early eighteenth century, the state was responsible for actively creating the conditions that would enable its subjects to become and remain happy.<sup>23</sup> Government should thus conform to the model of a well-ordered police state. The absolutist states of eighteenth century Germany aimed to secure their subjects' safety and welfare by means of, among other things, health policies, insurance schemes, and a great many legal regulations and formal prescriptions.<sup>24</sup> At the same time, such regulations

<sup>20</sup>Uther, 'Hans im Glück', 126ff.; Marion Schmaus, 'Von "Hans im Glück" und anderen Glückssuchern. Erzähllogik und Hermeneutik in den Märchen der Brüder Grimm', *literaturkritik.de* 12 (2012): 1–13.

<sup>21</sup>Cornel Zwierlein, 'Das Glück des Bürgers. Der aufklärerische Eudämonismus als Formationselement von Bürgerlichkeit und seine Charakteristika', in *Bürgerlichkeit im 18. Jahrhundert*, eds. Hans-Edwin Friedrich et al. (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2006), 71–113, esp. 99, 105.

<sup>22</sup>Howard Mumford Jones, *The Pursuit of Happiness* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1953); Jeffrey Barnouw, 'The Pursuit of Happiness in Jefferson and its Background in Bacon and Hobbes', *Interpretation* 11 (1983): 225–48; McMahon, *Happiness*, ch. 6.

<sup>23</sup>Christoph Link, 'Die Staatstheorie Christian Wolffs', in *Christian Wolff (1679-1754): Interpretationen zu seiner Philosophie und deren Wirkung*, ed. Werner Schneiders, 2nd ed. (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1986), 171–92; Clemens Schwaiger, *Das Problem des Glücks im Denken Christian Wolffs. Eine quellen-, begriffs- und entwicklungsgeschichtliche Studie zu Schlüsselbegriffen seiner Ethik* (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1995).

<sup>24</sup>Marc Raeff, *The Well-Ordered Police State: Social and Institutional Change Through Law in the Germanies and Russia, 1600-1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983); Andre Wakefield, *The Disordered Police State: German Cameralism as Science and Practice*



introduced normative ideas of how people should run their lives and care about their future happiness – ideas that clearly clashed with the emphasis on individual autonomy that began to gain momentum during the late eighteenth century.

Around 1800, such paternalistic state activity became less and less accepted. Instead, there was mounting pressure on the government to restrict itself to a few crucial functions: ensuring the rule of law, guaranteeing the security of individual property, and monopolizing violence, both internally and in protecting the state's external borders. *Glückseligkeit*, so the argument went, could and should not figure as a legitimate state purpose. Instead, the state was to ensure that people were not prevented from seeking it wherever they wanted to find it.<sup>25</sup> Such liberal concepts came close to what American revolutionaries had envisaged in the 1770s. They also shared the idea of happiness as a dynamic object of striving that defied any binding definition. What mattered was the pursuit of a goal that each person identified for themselves, in freedom and autonomy. A generally accepted definition of happiness of religious or political provenance was thus off the table – happiness meant whatever each individual understood by it.

This dynamic conception was also central to the thought of a German founding father, Immanuel Kant, the central figure of modern philosophy, who also pre-formulated the principles of a liberal constitutional state. Vehemently disagreeing with both Wolff's ideas on state responsibility and Bentham's utility concept, Kant dismissed happiness as a moral benchmark altogether. Happiness, he argued, was not a notion on which everyone could agree. One person's happiness could be another's misery. Taking the idea of individual autonomy seriously meant rejecting happiness, logically and empirically, as the common object of people's goals and actions. Under no circumstances could it ever serve as the foundation of universal morality. Freed from this heavy baggage, happiness could still figure as a personal wish, dream, and desire. What mattered, however, was happiness as movement rather than as an actual state and status. Here as everywhere, Kant emphasized the moment of individual self-determination and creative power: happiness did not come from the outside, randomly, as divine pardon or as the gift of a well-run state administration. It came from within, from people who strove for self-improvement and self-perfection.<sup>26</sup>

## V

Such happiness, however, was never easy to reach even if, in principle, it could be achieved by everybody, regardless of wealth, rank, gender, or age. To pursue and, hopefully, obtain it, required many active steps. Those steps linked happiness to work, competition, and contest – what Kant in 1784 referred to as 'antagonism'. According to the Königsberg philosopher, true happiness was out of the question for Arcadian shepherds. Their supposedly blissful state of harmony amounted to nothing but boredom, stagnation and waste of talent. Ambitiously striving for happiness, overcoming obstacles, convincing others to contribute to one's own happiness was what made the human species – and history – move forward.

In Kant's reflections on universal history, one might detect some semblance of the story of Adam and Eve and their expulsion from paradise. The final judgements, however, were fundamentally different. In contrast to the Old Testament, Kant viewed the disappearance of Arcadia in an absolutely positive light. In addition, his interpretation lacked any reference to sin and transgression. There was no desire to return and reconcile all opposites. On the contrary, only antagonism and its inherent dynamics seemed to allow for cultural progress and moral development. This promised an altogether different type of happiness than the one experienced in paradise. Instead of idleness

(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); *The Production of Human Security in Premodern and Contemporary History*, eds. Cornel Zwierlein et al. (= *Historical Social Research* 35,4 (2010), Special Issue No. 134).

<sup>25</sup>Cornel Zwierlein, 'Glück und Sicherheit in der Politik der Aufklärung und in der Gegenwart', in *Glück*, eds. André Holenstein et al. (Berne: Haupt, 2011), 53–81, esp. 61 f.

<sup>26</sup>Wolfgang Freising, *Kritische Philosophie und Glückseligkeit: Kants Auseinandersetzung mit dem Eudämonismus seiner Zeit* (Lüneburg: Schmidt-Neubauer, 1983); Zwierlein, 'Glück des Bürgers', 106ff.

and absence of effort, post-Arcadian happiness involved constant work, conflict, and hardship – the very things which Hans tried to escape from, at least temporarily, after seven years of toiling service.

I mentioned earlier that the Kantian ethics of duty and virtue, which placed happiness in a subordinate position and cut its connection with effortless luck, became quite influential in Germany and other countries. The emphasis on duty rather than happiness found many eloquent proponents who turned it into a moral principle, a symbol of national superiority, and a goal of higher education. In 1794 Johann Gottlieb Fichte wrote that happiness followed morality and could by no means be dissociated from the ‘moral nature of man’: ‘Not, *That which produces happiness is good*; – but, *That only which is good produces happiness*. Without morality, happiness is impossible.’<sup>27</sup> In a similar vein, Friedrich Wilhelm Foerster, an early twentieth-century best-selling author and pedagogue, fought against the ‘madness of believing that we are here in this world to find happiness’. The higher conception of life, as he saw it, required ‘not happiness, but purification and perfection’. Enjoyment and pleasure – which Hans in Luck cherished dearly – did not play a major role.<sup>28</sup>

Yet it would be misleading to trace all those statements – including Bismarck’s – exclusively back to Kant. They also found support in the Protestant work ethics as it had developed since the Reformation and marked many aspects of people’s inner as well as outer lives. Such an ethics, in turn, suited the developing capitalist economic system. Furthermore, it corresponded with the anti-aristocratic mindset of the middle classes and served to buttress the latter’s claim to political emancipation and participation in government. Aristocrats were generally criticized for wasting their time and talent on upper-class passions and distractions, instead of pursuing serious careers. The bourgeoisie by contrast prided itself on unceasing work and successful economic activity. As industrial entrepreneurs, they not only filled their own pockets and provided for their families, but also gave employment and resources to others. As doctors, lawyers, engineers, teachers, scholars, and scientists, they served mankind and advanced knowledge, health, and technology. For them, unlike members of the aristocracy, joy and happiness could be derived from the fruits of labour, from their own efforts and achievements and how these benefitted others.

The gap between the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie, between pleasure and work, was particularly stark in countries like France and Germany with strong and lasting traditions of absolutist rule that had favoured and privileged nobility. It was less prominent in Britain, whose top social layer was much more mixed. Instead of closing its ranks against the rising middle classes, the aristocracy represented itself as a relatively ‘open elite’. As a consequence, social mores and lifestyles tended to converge rather than remain segregated.<sup>29</sup> Pleasure and enjoyment became acceptable despite their aristocratic connotations, and entered middle-class households far more easily than on the Continent. This was reflected in the writings of political philosophers regarding happiness, in which were characterized by a less moralizing and more democratic tone.

But even the Continental bourgeoisie did not shy away from everything that savoured of pleasurable entertainment. In fact, the middle classes were extremely eager and inventive in creating ambitious cultural spaces, like coffee houses, restaurants, art clubs, museums, theatres, and concert halls. Music in particular was thought to fill its listeners with utmost joy and elation, from chamber music to symphonies, from opera to romantic songs. In order to really enjoy music, however, one had to first learn it and recognize its theory and structure. The same held true for the visual arts, theatre, and literature. Even dining did not figure as light entertainment, which was as taboo as light happiness.

Not even the family was what it promised to be: a sphere of mutual joy, private ease, and happiness. *Trautes Heim, Glück allein* (‘Home Sweet Home – happiness alone’): this saying graced countless bourgeois sofa cushions. It can be traced back to Friedrich Schiller and his famous 1799 Song of the Bell. According to the poet, happiness would not be found in a ‘hostile life’ where man was

<sup>27</sup>Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *The Vocation of the Scholar*, trans. William Smith (London: John Chapman, 1847), 23.

<sup>28</sup>Friedrich Wilhelm Foerster, *Lebensführung* (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1917), 11.

<sup>29</sup>Eric Hobsbawm, ‘The Example of the English Middle Class’, in *Bourgeois Society in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, eds. Jürgen Kocka and Allan Mitchell (Oxford: Berg, 1993), 127–50.

surrounded by enemies and competitors. Instead, it reigned supreme in ‘matters of family’ that were governed by ‘the housewife so modest, the mother of children’.<sup>30</sup> Here, the father and husband was supposed to relax and find true love, tenderness, and happiness. In this very function, family represented both the counterpart and the civilizational core of bourgeois society. It offered men the promise of happiness in a safe haven, protected from the turmoil of the market, work, and politics. For women, family provided the space where they could live up to their ‘natural determination’, which was, in short, to make others happy.

Family ideals and practices, however, were not always the same. For women, family was a sphere of constant attention, labour, and worry. To make husband and children happy was no easy task and demanded multiple skills and laborious efforts that weighed on women’s health and energy (not counting the high risk of dying in childbirth). At the same time, such efforts had to be hidden behind a veil of positive emotions and uplifting spirits. Women’s work for their families was not regarded as such; instead, it was supposed to be love. Men, who were the beneficiaries of love alias work, were thus driven to think about their homes as happy, work-free spaces, both for themselves and for their wives and children. Yet, this did not necessarily mean that it was the only space for them to experience happiness. Male first-person accounts including diaries, letters and autobiographies reveal how much pleasure and comfort men actually drew from their work, including the social communication and reputation that it secured.

## VI

Under particular circumstances, then, work felt like and created happiness. Under different circumstances it did not. Modern industry as it came to characterize and dominate the capitalist mode of production rendered it increasingly difficult to perceive work as a source of individual happiness. Based on the division of labour, the early twentieth-century assembly line turned into its most conspicuous symbol. Work processes became more and more small-scale and fragmented; creative work, such as that of Schiller’s bell founders, was in scarce supply, and so was the happiness that stemmed from it.

Since the early days of industrialization this development attracted fierce criticism. Some observers condemned what they called alienation, the growing distance between a producer and his product. In his 1845 book on the ‘Condition of the working class in England’ the young entrepreneur and socialist Friedrich Engels famously contrasted the moral and physical deprivation that he detected among industrial workers, with the happy, comfortable, and quasi-‘idyllic’ life those people had allegedly led in rural villages before taking up factory employment in Manchester.<sup>31</sup> In his later life, Engels came to acknowledge that the division of labour would not disappear from the modern world, and thus needed other remedies to heal or make up for the deficiencies inherent in dissociated and monotonous work processes. From around 1900, industrial psychologists turned their attention to the problem of monotony and fatigue. Side by side with entrepreneurs, they launched the ‘struggle for job satisfaction’ and propagated compensatory measures, like sports, social outings, competitions, or a more respectful communication between workers and bosses. For trade unionists, such endeavours were futile and only scratched the surface of the workers’ miserable lot. Instead, they campaigned for higher wages and shorter working hours.<sup>32</sup> For the lower classes, happiness was to be obtained, if at all, in a work-free environment. Consequently, the notion was absent

<sup>30</sup>Marianna Wertz, ‘Friedrich Schiller’s “The Song of the Bell”’, *Fidelio* 10 (2005): 36–45, quotes 42. As to nineteenth-century family ideals and practices, see Ute Frevert, *Women in German History: From Bourgeois Emancipation to Sexual Liberation* (Oxford: Berg, 1989), 61–147; Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and women of the English middle class 1780-1850* (London: Hutchinson, 1987).

<sup>31</sup>Frederick Engels, *The condition of the working class in England in 1844*. Reprint with the dedication written by Engels in English in 1845 (London: Allan and Unwin, 1952), 1–4 (with a sudden Kantian twist at the end when Engels criticized such ‘cozily romantic’ existence as ‘not worthy of human beings’, *ibid.*, 3).

<sup>32</sup>Sabine Donauer, ‘Emotions at Work – Working on Emotions: The Production of Economic Selves in Twentieth-Century Germany’ (PhD thesis, Berlin 2013) ([http://www.diss.fu-berlin.de/diss/receive/FUDISS\\_thesis\\_000000100445](http://www.diss.fu-berlin.de/diss/receive/FUDISS_thesis_000000100445)).

from the vocabulary of the labour movement. Their political lexicon did not include any enjoyment-related terms, focusing instead on work, activity, pursuit, gains, and, above all, struggle. Socialists did not fight for happiness but for freedom, equality, and justice.

Tellingly, in 1865, Karl Marx's answer to the question 'what is your idea of happiness' was a laconic 'to fight'. Misery, by contrast, was equivalent to 'submission'.<sup>33</sup> The father of socialism thus conformed to and confirmed the basic lesson of his liberal middle-class upbringing: men were not slaves but found happiness (if at all) when they stood up for their principles and convictions. In this sense, the labour movement was no real antipode of the bourgeois-capitalist system of values, but its product. A more categorical opposition can be traced in the artistic culture of romanticism, with writers such as Friedrich Schlegel cherishing the 'spirit of pleasure' as much as the 'right to idleness'. In a similar vein, French utopian socialists called for the liberation of the passions and praised the transformational power of hedonistic love.<sup>34</sup> In his early days, Marx allowed himself to dream of a communist society that came close to paradise. By abolishing the division of labour, it would provide the social and material conditions under which happiness might finally be obtained. Everyone would be free 'to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic'.<sup>35</sup> While Marx still believed in creative activity (including fighting) as the foundation of happiness, his son-in-law, Paul Lafargue, sang the praise of laziness in a loud and provocative manner, setting a deliberate counterpoint to what he considered the plague of his time: the addiction to work. In his view, revolutionary socialists should strive to undermine the bourgeois capitalist morality that strove 'to reduce the producer to the smallest number of needs' and 'suppress his joys and his passions'.<sup>36</sup>

Lafargue was by no means the last to condemn capitalism and its social formations as obstructive to desire, pleasure, and happiness. The twentieth century repeatedly brought forth criticisms of, and counter-proposals to, what was perceived as the repression, alienation, and commodification of human beings. Starting with the youth and life-reform movements around 1900, including zealous followers of Friedrich Nietzsche and Stefan George, criticism gained steam with the hippy culture of the 60s, the hedonistic part of the student movement and the New Age groups of the 80s. These sought happiness above all in liberation from the bourgeois norms of possessiveness, careerism and sexual prudery. But they also tried to find it in new forms of community and, not to forget, in individual transgression, ecstasy, and drug use. They also discovered psychotherapy, in its many old and new forms, as a means to overcome individual blockades, inhibitions, and depression.<sup>37</sup>

For the young members and supporters of these counter-movements, the Kantian doctrine of duty and virtue was clearly no longer valid. They were not interested in morality, but in happiness conceived as the individual maximization of fulfilled desire. They were not interested in sublimating desire and transforming it into culture-creating labour, as their parents and grandparents had done

<sup>33</sup>*Familie Marx privat. Die Foto- und Fragebogen-Alben von Marx' Töchtern Laura und Jenny. Eine kommentierte Faksimile-Edition*, eds. Izumi Omura et al. (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2005), 234 f. Filling out such questionnaires that asked for one's favourite virtue, flower, or colour up to personal maxims and mottos was a pastime of the European middle classes during the nineteenth century.

<sup>34</sup>From Schlegel's *Lucinde* (1799), quoted in Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin Mc Laughlin (Cambridge/MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 379; *Fourier: The Theory of the Four Movements*, ed. Gareth Stedman Jones and Ian Patterson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

<sup>35</sup>Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*. Part one, ed. C. J Arthur (New York: International Publisher, 2004), 53.

<sup>36</sup>Paul Lafargue, *The right to be lazy and other studies*, trans. Charles H. Kerr (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 1907), 4. Perhaps not surprisingly, Lafargue's answer to the question about happiness had been, in 1868, 'un bon dessert', while his idea of misery was being cold ('avoir froid') (*Familie Marx privat*, 339).

<sup>37</sup>Sven Reichardt, *Authentizität und Gemeinschaft: Linksalternatives Leben in den siebziger und frühen achtziger Jahren* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2014); *Das alternative Milieu. Antibürgerlicher Lebensstil und linke Politik in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und Europa 1968-1983*, eds. Sven Reichardt and Detlef Siegfried (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2010); Joachim Häberlein and Jake P. Smith, 'Struggling for Feelings: The Politics of Emotions in the Radical New Left in West Germany, c. 1968-84', *Contemporary European History* 23, no. 4 (2014): 615-37; idem, 'Feeling Like a Child. Dreams and Practices of Sexuality in the West-German Alternative Left During the Long 1970s', *The Journal for the History of Sexuality* 25, no. 2 (2016): 219-45.

and as Sigmund Freud had analysed so sharply. Instead, happiness, experienced with relish, became a legitimate end in itself. Such emancipation from 'bourgeois' morality was experienced both as personal liberation and as a way to finally change society for the better. Since revolutions could no longer be relied upon to bring about true happiness, as could be witnessed in socialist countries, subversion seemed to offer a more practicable and successful option.

## VII

At the same time, there were other forces at work that profoundly transformed the way people thought and felt about happiness. In hindsight, the subcultural feast of desire and pleasure was a sideline to a much broader development that has shaped society as a whole. Since the early twentieth century, and gaining momentum after 1945, the emergence of modern consumer culture has reinvented citizens as pleasure- and happiness-seeking consumers. Individual happiness could be achieved through the consumption of ever more and ever newer goods; at least this is what the advertising industry promised. Armed with the latest findings of applied psychology, advertising continuously promoted new venues and arenas of happiness: from the 'Strength through Joy' programmes of Nazi tourism to the pleasures of individual travel in private cars; from exultation over a cup of pure bean coffee to the promises of ever more complicated espresso machines; from the enjoyment of romantic moments at a campsite to the luxuries of a Caribbean beach hotel. Consumption guaranteed happiness, no matter whether it was the purchase of a tennis racket, a diamond ring or a perfume (aptly named 'Happy'), but with a steady progress up the monetary scale.<sup>38</sup>

The happiness that is to be achieved through consumption is characterized, first, by the absence of work. Work's only purpose is to enable the acquisition of worldly goods and services; the concept of 'gainful employment' expresses this in all due clarity. Second, happiness is a private, not a public affair. It takes place in intimate spaces, not in society, let alone in the political arena. Today, Aristotle's claim that happiness is located in the polis seems as strange as Wolff's conviction that the state is responsible for citizens' happiness. Third, happiness is perceived as personal enjoyment and pure pleasure. It bears no relation to shared morals and objectives. In a 1998 survey Germans were asked to define what happiness meant to them. They had to choose between two possible answers: 'To me happiness means to fulfil all my wishes', and 'To me happiness means to do my duty'. Only 19 percent of the respondents chose the second option – an outcome to make Kant, Fichte, and Foerster turn in their graves.

This trend demonstrates an unflinching enthusiasm for individual freedom and autonomy. Dissociating happiness from duty and work helps to thoroughly individualize and privatize it. Being no longer subject to a general morality, an individual is free to pursue her own goals and live her own life. Such individualism comes with baggage and burdens, however. In the absence of general norms and obligations, new expectations and prescriptions arise, producing new patterns of conformity. As consumers, people follow fashions and hypes, thus subscribing to programmes of happiness that are far less unique and individual than promised. Furthermore, the pursuit of such happiness imposes extreme psychological as well as material demands. The Caribbean beach hotel costs far more than a tent on a camping ground. And psychologically, if happiness is so important in modern life all kinds of uncertainties emerge. How can happiness be achieved and maintained? How do you know that you are really happy instead of just feeling fine? What is the difference between being happy and having fun (which seems to be the standard expectation in contemporary life)? People look for help and advice, they consult therapists (or, sometimes, philosophers) and/or they buy self-help books, the number of which has grown exponentially. Although advice literature has been around since the nineteenth century, it has boomed since the mid-twentieth century, especially in two areas: love and happiness.

<sup>38</sup>Frank Trentmann, *Empire of Things: How We Became a World of Consumers, from the Fifteenth Century to the Twenty-First* (London: Allan Lane, 2016), part 2.



## VIII

What would Hans in Luck have thought of this development? His story takes place at the beginning of the modern age that promoted individual happiness in various shapes and guises. Hans' choices could be interpreted as belonging to an older, distinctly pre-modern moral economy that did not care so much about making provisions and planning the future, and did not privilege the exchange value of goods over their use value. Instead – as far as Hans is concerned – it favoured instant gratification, spontaneous joy and gratitude, and, last but not least, filial love, and commitment to one's family.

On the other hand, Hans might appear as an early individualist who deliberately defies any norms regarding how to make one's fortune and promote one's success. He is the one who defines what happiness is about and when it occurs, and he sets himself radically free from social expectations and prescriptions. He is not a born anarchist, however, since he has complied with collective norms by serving his master diligently, loyally, and continuously for seven years, without ever asking for wages or salary and without, it seems, having a life beyond work and service. Nevertheless as soon as his term is over and he steps out of this life of dependency and regulation, he acts in a quasi-anarchical way that defies any long-term economic calculation and related social expectations of using what he has earned in order to set up his own household and start his own trade. Instead of following the dictates of reason, he follows spontaneous intuitions and suggestions. Each of them makes him objectively poorer, but subjectively, Hans experiences ever greater happiness.

As such, the story could also be read as an early critique of the new, thoroughly modern moral economy that had slowly started to change people's preferences and references. Hans does not believe in accumulating riches, and his material transactions fall desperately short of advancing his economic wellbeing. They do not even live up to their original promises, but Hans does not seem to mind. His values and preferences simply do not fit the logic of capitalism, since he is not at all interested in the exchange value of marketable goods.

With this attitude would Hans be a ready follower of revolutionary slogans that promised him ever greater happiness once he bought into the rhetoric of radical upheaval of all things and relations? At first glance, yes, since in his interactions with others he could be easily manipulated and talked into making idealistic choices that, at second sight, served others' interests more than his own. So we might very well imagine Hans having fun at the festival of happiness organized by French revolutionaries in the early 1790s, or believing the Bolshevik notion of vigorous new men who would build a healthy and happy socialist society in the 1920s by putting behind them the perversions of capitalist morality.

Yet it is hard to believe that Hans in Luck would retain his optimism after decades of revolutionary propaganda that continuously and conspicuously fell short of its promises. In lieu of alternatives, he might join subversive cultural movements that tried to lure him into a happy paradise of liberated sexuality, shared material possessions, and mind-altering substances. But he might equally turn into an aficionado of capitalist consumer culture instead. In fact, he himself abandoned the sphere of productive labour after seven years of toil, and found happiness in reaping the benefits of his labour. He was shopping for best bargains, in a manner of speaking, and everything he bought or exchanged made him ecstatically happy. He might thus qualify as the prototype of the modern consumer who bought what was marketed as an experience of happiness.

The tale of Hans in Luck thus invites many diverse and even contradictory historical representations and interpretations. Yet one thing is clear and indisputable: Hans' search for happiness and *Seelenfreude* is no longer concerned with, or limited by, moral prescriptions and social conventions. He neither cares for the opinion of others (not even that of his mother), and how they might assess his regressive transactions, nor are morals on his mind, which, unlike in most other fairy tales, is extraordinarily active. Hans is constantly preoccupied with his own feelings, and he repeatedly considers himself a happy person. Usually it is the narrator's voice that delivers the final verdict and accords happiness to the hero – all's well that ends well. Hans, however, reflects on what he



is doing and is his own narrator.<sup>39</sup> This, too, might make him look like the prototype of a modern man – preoccupied with his feelings and hunting for pleasures whose half-life is getting shorter and shorter.

Two centuries later, these modern men (and women, by now) find themselves in a dizzying situation. On the one hand, happiness still figures as the most cherished and sought after item on people's private wish list. On the other hand, it seems harder than ever to achieve it, and insecurities concerning what real happiness might feel like abound. Individualization and the pluralization of lifestyles have transformed happiness into something multi-faceted and highly diverse. Accordingly, the number and variety of those who are supposed to sell, provide, and ensure happiness has multiplied and continues to do so. Recently, the Coca-Cola Company even founded an institute on happiness in order to gather expert knowledge on the subject and to propagate the joy of life. Schools have introduced curricula on happiness, and self-help books sell extraordinarily well.

At the same time, economists have embarked on efforts to measure happiness and thus homogenize the concept. They usually employ two different standards of measurement: that of subjective well-being and objective criteria such as health, job security, income levels, family size, and social relations. Scaling happiness and defining it through empirical data has helped politicians to pursue new – or rather, old – goals and implement policies that are easy to market to their constituencies. Nevertheless such strategies are based on the illusion that well-being or contentment is the same as happiness. When people experience and report subjective well-being, they usually tend to distinguish it, discreetly or outspokenly, from the emphatic notion of happiness that comes with serene joyfulness, exuberance, and bliss. Such notion has, miraculously, outlived all attempts to reduce it to a level compatible with and reachable within the limits of a modern consumer society. Not to be confused with the short-lived state of ecstasy induced by drugs, or by equally brief moments of sexual elation, it might be defined as what a recent report on happiness called 'eudaimonic well-being'. By explicitly invoking ancient Greek concepts (that flourished well into the eighteenth century), such well-being refers 'to people's perception of the meaningfulness (or pointlessness), sense of purpose, and value of their life'.<sup>40</sup> It thus aims to reintroduce morality and higher principles into modern people's experience and self-evaluation, without, however, closing the door to strictly hedonistic, Hans-in-Luck style choices. After all, all men and women are the makers of their own fortune, or happiness. At least, this is what most Europeans still seem to believe.<sup>41</sup>

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

<sup>39</sup>Schmaus, 'Von "Hans im Glück"', 10.

<sup>40</sup>*Subjective Well-Being: Measuring Happiness, Suffering, and Other Dimensions of Experience*. A Report by the National Research Council, eds. Arthur A. Stone and Christopher Mackie (Washington: National Academies Press, 2013), 19.

<sup>41</sup>As for surveys in East- and West Germany, see Thomas Petersen, 'Die Bewältigung der Diktatur', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, March 16, 2011, 7.