

WELL-BEING AS A SOCIAL MUST. BUT IS WELL-BEING HEALTHY?

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WELL-BEING AS A SOCIAL MUST

Listening to the media, flipping through magazines, in training courses, today the conquest of well-being seems to be a social must. Living well becomes the new imperative: sadness, anger, anxiety, are feelings to be deleted.

But it was not always so, just think of old photographs, of portraits of our great-grandparents with their austere clothes and serious expressions, solemn. Today all the family photographs, without exception, display smiles.

Not so in every cultures. Recent studies (Christopher, 1999), and evidence show that in Eastern societies the showing off of well-being is considered a sign of immaturity and, therefore, the individual must show an attitude of modesty. Asking an Eastern person for a numerical evaluation of the personal well-being, they will give lower scores than Westerners.

While in our society we tend to match well-being, that is the good life, with an emotionally satisfying life, in the Chinese collectivist society the good life is measured by the filial piety and with the ability to live in harmony with others (King Bond, 1985), giving less importance to how you feel.

Comparing different countries, some researchers (Diener, 1997) found that the satisfaction of life of a country is highly correlated with the degree of individualism.

So subjective well-being is actually a normative construct, i.e. the product of the values and principles central to a culture.

THE SEARCH FOR WELFARE : AN ENGINE OF THE COMPANY OF GROWTH

The thoughts guidelines conveyed by both the economic and social world, and by world of culture, can affect the preconditions in which people assess their state of health and well-being and change their lifestyle.

In our Western society, parallel to the proliferation of actual risks for the individual (illness, unemployment, natural disasters, accidents,...), we notice the cultural tendency to define any event as a risk (Beck, 1986).

Tobacco, alcohol, diet, lack of exercise, anything can be a risk to our health. People are induced to a "duty of health" and the good life becomes an expression of normativity (Zamperini, 2010). One of the goals of a certain kind of psychology is the optimization of the individual: an ideal of personal and professional fulfillment, functional to an excellent performance, which should make the individual fulfilled and happy.

At the same time the supreme value of the consumer society is a "happy life" (Bauman, 2007), and indeed, the consumer society is perhaps the only society in human history that promises an instant happiness that you should perpetuate through consumerism, quickly liquidating losses and filling the gaps with new things, "to possess and consume certain objects and practice a certain style of life is a necessary condition of happiness, and because happiness has become a hallmark of respectability and the right to be respected, it tends also to become the necessary condition of dignity and self-esteem".

The advertising does not advertise exclusively the product, but also a way of life: buying a certain product is bound to get us love, security, a sense of identity. It creates an association between the product and positive emotions, such as social inclusion, success and ultimately welfare.

IF I AM NOT HAPPY I AM NOT ENOUGH

The culture of health with an emphasis on individual responsibility makes it look any relationship between the individual and his well-being as determined by personal initiative and by the ability to

find individual inner resources (Ehrenberg, 1998). This concept certainly has the great merit of placing the emphasis on the resources and capabilities of the individual, but it also implicitly conveys the idea that we ourselves are the only responsible for our health: not offering the individual the opportunity of seeing his behaviors as the result of socio-economic and cultural influences puts him in check in front of his possible failure; the consequence is that if we are not happy it's because we are not adequate.

The symptoms are consequent inhibition and loss of initiative, irreconcilable with the image that society demands of each individual (Bruni and Defilippi, 2013). People are convinced that if they are sick, they 'were not able', they are not 'good enough'.

THE HISTORY OF THE BUTTERFLY di Kazantzakis (1946)

A man thought he could accelerate the birth of the butterfly from the cocoon. He saw a small hole where the nymph was trying with great effort to get out, to be born. The man was impatient, he opened the hole to help the butterfly out: in a short time the cocoon opened and the butterfly began to emerge, effortlessly, without any difficulty. There was only one drawback: the butterfly was never able to fly. It lived all its life as a worm of the earth.

Eliminating the difficulty it is not always the best path. Sometimes in suffering, fear, boredom, there is much more wisdom than we may think. Emotions are not a private matter but a form of communication, and they give us information about what is going on (Bertrando, 2009). The point is not to erase it but to take it as a sign of something else. If we are not happy we should not take the pill in order to feel happy, but we should try to understand why I do not feel happy. If you throw it away, delete it with medication, as some psychiatrists recommend, it would be like opening the cocoon of a butterfly first. Our butterfly needs the strain, the discomfort of finding the meaning, the effort she needs to fly.

AN ECOLOGICAL WELL-BEING IN A SOCIETY OF DEGROWTH

Bateson (1972) proposed to define a new concept of "ecological health", a unique system of environment joined to a 'elevated' human civilization, which could harmonize with the environment, to give rise to a complex dynamic system. A 'elevated' civilization is a civilization that is smart enough to limit its desire to behaviors that do not destroy the overall dynamical system.

Following this line we must begin to think about a new idea of ecological well-being as well, where the welfare of the people is no longer represented by individual happiness at all costs, of any kind it is, but it can be read as a holistic concept, that reinstates the notions of community, of the importance of negative emotions, of the sense of limits.

The "healthy", whole person is not necessarily the one with "no symptoms", but one whose elements of health and disease can live together as complementary parts. The healthy individual can be both a symptomatic person and a 'no symptoms' one, depending on when and how he is considered by the observer, and through which cultural framework (Keeney, 1983).

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