



# Introduction

## ANTHROPOLOGY, HAPPINESS, AND WELL-BEING

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Today, happiness is everywhere—at least in bookstores. There are numerous tomes to be found on “happiness,” “the pursuit of happiness,” “the history of happiness,” and “the science of happiness,” teaching, in so many words, how to become happy. Some of these books are very informative, based in evidence from the research of psychologists and economists and other experts (see, for example, Gilbert 2007; Layard 2005; McMahon 2006), but most more or less share a common misunderstanding. They assume that there is a single “pursuit of happiness”—but is there? We argue that there is not. Happiness is not one thing; it means different things in different places, different societies, and different cultural contexts. There is no unambiguously single pursuit of happiness—rather, there are multiple “pursuits of happiness.”

This is where anthropology comes in. Sociocultural anthropology is primarily the study of different societies in all their social and cultural specificity and complexity. Most of the chapters of this book, based on an anthropologist’s long-term experience and ethnographic research in a given society, indicate how happiness is conceived of, expressed, and experienced in that society. Thus, for example, Heil in chapter 4 shows how for the Australian Aborigines she lived with, it is a matter of being immersed in a close network of kin, in all the mutual social obligations this entails. Derné in chapter 6 shows how for young Indian men, it is a matter of being comfortably guided by one’s parents in one’s crucial life decisions, such as whom to marry. Jankowiak in chapter 7, by contrast, shows how for Chinese in the early 2000s, it is a matter of being able to pursue one’s own freely chosen goals in life, unrestrained by government control of one’s life. Clark, in chapter 9, shows how for Japanese, it may be based in the socially experienced physical pleasure of the bath. As these and many other chapters in this book imply, happiness is not necessarily the same everywhere; the experience of happiness is culturally specific.

And yet it is not only culturally specific. Today we may pick up cultural influences from far-flung societies the world over: a Mumbai businesswoman may seek happiness through a popular American self-help

book, while her New York counterpart may seek happiness instead through the guidance of the *Bhagavad Gita* or a twenty-first-century Indian guru's writings. Underlying this is the fact that we are all human, sharing a broadly common physical and genetic makeup, and on that basis experiencing the world in broadly common ways. Although there are exceptions in various places and times and situations, by and large human beings the world over have preferred love over hate within their particular human group, freedom from pain over experiencing pain, and meaning over meaninglessness. Beneath all the cultural diversity in happiness, there is a stratum of human commonality—anthropology in its ethnographic portraits of particular peoples can teach us not only about their happiness, but, at least indirectly, about our own happiness as well.

And that is the purpose of this book. Most of the chapters of this book discuss specific societies, but the implications of their discussions may transcend these societies. This book's most basic argument is that by understanding happiness—or well-being—in a diverse array of societies, we can begin to understand it in its cultural specificities and also in a broader, human sense. First, however, let us set forth a change in terms. Happiness is a difficult term to discuss because it is ultimately subjective—who but a given individual can say whether she is happy or not? (As a stereotypical fragment of conversation might have it, "I think she's crazy. But if it makes her happy, what can I say?") Beyond this, in English as well as a number of other languages, what exactly "happiness" refers to between the transient and the permanent is unclear. In English, inquiries into happiness may for some evoke thoughts of a good meal, for others a nice car, for others a good marriage, and for others a good relationship with God. These different forms of happiness are not the same thing, despite being covered by a common term, and the same is the case for the equivalents to happiness in languages other than English. All in all, comparisons of happiness across societies seem problematic, due to linguistic and cultural barriers that seem impossible to fully surmount (Mathews 2006). Well-being, on the other hand, has an objective as well as subjective component. Happiness is a distinctive part of well-being, the most essential part; but well-being is more than that, which is why it is the centerpiece of this book's analysis.

## The Meanings of Well-Being

What, then, is well-being? One place to begin is with the standard dictionary definition of the term: "the state of being healthy, happy, or

prosperous.” The “or” indicates that well-being might refer to any of these three attributes, but the fact that these three terms are placed together in the definition implies their interconnection. But what is the relation of “happy” to “healthy” and “prosperous”? “Healthy” refers to a positive state of one’s body, and “prosperous” to a positive state of one’s finances. Both of these may contribute to “happiness,” a positive state of one’s mind, but they may not: some of us know of physically healthy, financially well-off people who, in their intense unhappiness, commit suicide. These three attributes refer to positive states in different realms that may be but are not necessarily related. Nonetheless, this commonsensical definition does give a sense of what we mean when we use the term *well-being*. It connotes being well psychologically, physically, and socioeconomically, and, we should add, culturally: it is all these things working together.

The beauty of this term, for our purposes, is that it combines the objective and the subjective, enabling both the examination of happiness in what exactly it means and feels like in different cultural contexts, and also a more detached view, enabling at least the possibility of societal comparison. If we are going to explore the broadest human connotations of happiness, then that term itself should perhaps best be laid aside in favor of a broader panhuman term—one that, unlike *happiness*, may not necessarily be used by the people that anthropologists study. This term, the term we will use throughout this book, is *well-being*.

*Well-being* is not nearly as common a term as *happiness*, at least not in the popular literature, but it too has exploded in its usage over the past two decades, becoming an important term for social sciences such as economics, public health, and psychology, although not anthropology. The term has become widely used for a variety of reasons. One reason for its growing usage is the realization by economists that measures such as income—defining standard of living—cannot fully tell us about what makes life good or less good to live in different places. Thus they seek a broader, better measure. Another, quite different reason is that medical professionals have increasingly come to realize that merely keeping people alive, in an era in which medical technology has been rapidly developing, is insufficient; rather, individuals’ well-being must also be closely considered. Another reason is that many psychologists have in recent decades turned from the study of mental illness to the study of mental health: from the study of “ill-being” to the study of well-being, and how to attain and maintain such a state. Finally, there has increasingly emerged in the United States and other affluent societies the idea that well-being is not simply to be assumed as a matter of good fortune, but must be strived for, fueling a massive self-help indus-

try. Well-being has thus come into prominence for an array of disparate reasons in different fields. Well-being, it is now generally recognized, cannot be taken for granted, but must be studied and consciously pursued—and analyzed.

*Well-being* is often used interchangeably with a number of other terms. *Well-being* and *quality of life* seem almost synonymous in their usages in a range of disciplines, in such diverse areas as medicine and rehabilitation (as in the journal *Quality of Life Research*), economics, and philosophy (Ferry 2005; Nussbaum and Sen 1993). *Well-being* is also sometimes used synonymously with *wellness* and *health* (Brim et al. 2004; Bryant et al. 2001). *Well-being* is also used in a way that seems synonymous with *life satisfaction* (Bornstein et al. 2003; Diener and Suh 2000). In this book, we use *well-being* rather than *quality of life* in that the latter, in much of the literature, implies external observation and evaluation alone; *well-being*, on the other hand, also implies consideration of people's own internal states of mind. Anthropology, as we have discussed, is a discipline based in the latter more than the former; it typically seeks "to grasp the native's point of view" (Malinowski 1961 [1922], 25), rather than simply imposing an observer's view. We use *well-being* rather than *wellness* or *health*, in that the latter terms focus primarily on physical well-being, which is a necessary part of well-being but by no means encompasses the term. Indeed, as chapters in this book by Izquierdo (chapter 3) and Heil (chapter 4) reveal, health and well-being may contradict one another.

Let us now try to come up with a fuller, more exact definition of well-being. This is complicated, because different disciplines define well-being in distinctly different ways. Veenhoven, to cite a contemporary sociological authority, has discussed the various ways in which well-being is conceptualized (2004). He characterizes sociologists and economists as conceiving of well-being as "living in a good environment," while psychologists as well as healthcare professionals tend to conceive of it as being well-equipped "to cope with the problems of life" (2004, 5–6). Veenhoven writes that well-being is "a typical catch-all term without a precise meaning" (2004, 5). This seems true, and yet the broadest formulations of the term do attempt to combine the external and the internal, the objective and subjective modes that Veenhoven describes:

Well-being is a positive state of affairs, brought about by the simultaneous satisfaction of personal, relational, and collective needs of individuals and communities (Prilleltensky 2005).

Well-being incorporates a variety of objective factors such as being healthy, being safe (from crime or violence), being financially secure, hav-

ing access to resources, including education, culture, roads, and transport. Well-being also however incorporates more subjective factors such as being happy ... feeling connected to one's community and having the capacity to cope with adverse life events (Ogilvie 2002).

These formulations are somewhat culture-bound, especially the second; but they do have the merit of encompassing objective and subjective conceptions of well-being, and interlinking the individual, community, and society in their definitions. Let us now offer our own broad definition:

Well-being is an optimal state for an individual, community, society, and the world as a whole. It is conceived of, expressed, and experienced in different ways by different individuals and within the cultural contexts of different societies: different societies may have distinctly different culturally shaped visions of well-being. Nonetheless, well-being bears a degree of commonality due to our common humanity and interrelatedness over space and time. Well-being is experienced by individuals—its essential locus lies within individual subjectivity—but it may be considered and compared interpersonally and interculturally, since all individuals live within particular worlds of others, and all societies live in a common world at large.

Different chapters of this book offer different particular formulations of well-being, in ethnographically portraying different social and cultural contexts, but all the chapters of the book fit within this broad formulation.

The above formulation differs from the earlier ones we cited in its stress on different social and cultural senses of well-being. The single greatest lack, in the different disciplinary conceptions of well-being we have discussed, is their refusal to examine how well-being is conceived of differently in different social and cultural contexts across the globe. This is what anthropology can provide: one more essential piece to the puzzle of well-being considered worldwide. Returning to the three terms of our earlier definition, health and prosperity can be measured objectively by physicians, public health experts, or economists, whether in terms of individuals or of a society at large. However, the valuation given to these domains may differ in different societies with, for example, some societies seeing wealth as the greatest of all personal goals and others seeing the desire for wealth as contemptible. Beyond this, happiness, as we have argued, is subjective and culture bound, and cannot easily be ascertained by any universal measures. Different societies may adhere to different culturally and linguistically constructed concepts of happiness, making cross-societal comparison more or less problematic. Even more fundamentally, different societies have differ-

ent cultural conceptions of what it means to be happy, satisfied, and well that must be taken into consideration.

Having said this, however, these different conceptions of health, wealth, and happiness are for the most part not incommensurable. Underlying these different conceptions, it is indeed possible to make a comparison of different societies as to well-being, as long as this is done in a careful, culturally sensitive way. This can be done through what we in this book term *soft comparison*, comparison based not on—or at least not solely on—bald statistics placed side by side, but rather on all the nuances of sociocultural context ethnographically portrayed. But before exploring this, let us examine recent attempts of other disciplines as to the societal comparison of well-being.

### The Comparison of Different Societies as to Well-Being

Over the past several decades, the comparison of societies by NGOs and academic think tanks as to well-being has become widespread and influential. Most of these ratings are made on the basis of measurable data, in terms of, for example, per capita income, life expectancy, education levels, and rates of infant mortality. These rankings clearly rate something of importance. Many of us would rather live in a society with long life expectancy, high levels of literacy, and ready access to health-care and clean water, than a society with low levels of these attributes. But the relation of these external markers to internal states of well-being remains an open question. Erich Fromm, in the opening chapter of his book *The Sane Society* (1955), asks how it can be that the societies with the most wealth also have the highest rates of “destructive acts” (suicide/homicide) and of alcoholism—contradictions that can be seen as much today as when Fromm wrote. Certainly many works of fiction and film depicting societies near the top of most well-being indexes, such as those of Western Europe, as well as Japan and the United States, depict all too convincingly Thoreau’s famous observation that “the mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation.” This point can be overstated; surveys show that “in general people in rich countries are ... happier than people in poor countries” (Frey and Stutzer 2002, 9), a point that, whatever reservations one may have about such surveys, seems plausible. But the statistical measures mentioned above leave aside the crucial matter of how people themselves feel about their lives, and without that, how much can we really understand?

Indeed, well-being, as we have formulated it, connotes subjectivity. While well-being “largely arises from and is influenced by various

structural arrangements in which individuals are imbedded” (Pearlin 1989, 241)—the cultural patternings, social relations, and institutional arrangements within which we live—it is nonetheless experienced as individual. A number of psychologists have recognized this. In contrast to objective well-being, measures of health and wealth and other external factors, they investigate what they term “subjective well-being”: how individuals themselves rate their well-being, in answering questions about how satisfied they are with their lives. Diener and Suh (2000), to mention one prominent example, examine in their edited book senses of subjective well-being across a range of societies, on the basis of cross-cultural survey research.

At first glance, this may seem to solve the problem of subjectivity—after all, people report on their own feelings of well-being in such surveys—but fuller consideration shows that the problem of understanding how people themselves understand their lives remains. Surveys do not ask respondents to talk about their senses of well-being in their own words. Rather, they ask for informants’ closed-ended answers to fixed questions, as translated into different languages. This not only ignores how individuals express their own senses of their lives, but also ignores how different languages and cultures conceive of well-being in different ways. The problem here is that which we earlier discussed in terms of happiness: cross-cultural comparison of survey data leaves out too much to be fully credible.

Let us provide one example of this. “Why are North Americans happier than East Asians?” asks a chapter in Diener and Suh’s above-cited book (Suh 2000, 64, 72). This question assumes that the survey results being compared reflect the underlying reality of happiness and well-being or the lack thereof, rather than represent the product of the surveys themselves and their culturally shaped responses. As a more skeptical observer has noted, Americans may “inflate their reports of happiness. . . . Most modern Americans say they are very or extremely happy, and one must be skeptical about whether their lives are really so wonderful” as the quick answers they give to survey questions indicate (Baumeister 1991, 210). Indeed, in a society declaring in its founding document the inalienable right to “the pursuit of happiness,” one is culturally enjoined to pursue and proclaim one’s happiness. It is almost as if one is required to be happy, or at least to be able to describe how one is earnestly pursuing such a state, in order to be fully and normally American. In East Asian societies such as Japan, on the other hand, personal modesty is an ingrained social value—one is enjoined not to boast about one’s success in life or declare too loudly one’s personal happiness or well-being. To proclaim happiness, even in an anonymous

survey, may be felt to be an affront to modesty. Thus it may well be that North Americans are not “happier than Asians,” but are simply more willing to proclaim their happiness on a survey form.<sup>1</sup>

This is not to dismiss all survey research, some of which can indeed be valuable. As earlier noted, measures such as life expectancy, infant mortality, literacy rates, and per capita income are important in understanding a society’s senses of well-being. Findings concerning “subjective well-being” may also be quite useful in some contexts (see, as one interesting example, Helliwell 2002). The problem remains, however, that none of these measures, of objective well-being or of subjective well-being, can fully get at well-being in all its complexity. For this kind of examination, we must turn to anthropology, the empirical study of culture. This book will show how anthropology can particularly contribute to the analysis of societies as to well-being, and thereby lend a greater degree of nuance to the cross-cultural comparison of well-being.

## **Anthropology and the Study of Well-Being**

While economists, public health specialists, and psychologists as well as other social scientists have written many books and articles on well-being and have been widely influential in their findings, anthropologists have been almost entirely silent. Anthropologists sometimes make use of comparative statistical measures such as life expectancy, but are usually unwilling to generalize about well-being on the basis of such measures. Anthropologists also tend to be highly skeptical of psychological surveys such as those we have discussed, seeing them as inevitably ethnocentric in their use of Western-derived survey instruments to compare a range of societies across the world. While these psychological studies are becoming more sophisticated, taking into account cultural differences in conception and expression (see the review of well-being research by Diener and Tov 2007<sup>2</sup>), many anthropologists remain dubious. After all, the very act of measurement presumes a common cross-cultural scale; but is there any such scale? Doesn’t any effort to create such a scale inevitably privilege some cultural conceptions over others? And doesn’t it reify what can be measured, and ignore what cannot be measured? Many would answer these last two questions with a clear “yes.”

Some anthropologists, such as Colby in chapter 2 of this book, argue that these difficulties can be overcome, enabling cross-cultural statistical comparison; chapters 1 and 2 both offer arguments that support, on very



different bases, the broad-based cross-cultural comparison of well-being. However, most anthropologists, including most of those appearing in the remaining chapters of this book, are skeptical of such efforts. Indeed, the reader will find that one function of this book as a whole is to show that the American or Western conceptions of well-being are insufficient to understand well-being in a range of societies across the globe, and are thus insufficient as a basis for the cross-cultural comparison of well-being.

Anthropologists specialize in understanding, through extended fieldwork, the complex cultural meanings that exist within a given society. They may be especially well situated to understand a given society's particular linguistic formulations of well-being and to reveal, through close ethnographic description, how these play out in people's daily lives, words, and worlds. Although the term *well-being* has been little used among anthropologists until recently (see Colby 1987; Adelson 2000), many anthropologists have, in effect, engaged in the study of well-being in their meticulous ethnographies. To name just a few of many, Schieffelin's (1976) discussion of Kaluli existential perceptions of life as expressed in ceremony, Bourgois's (1995) account of life in a New York City crack den, Plath's (1980) account of the meaning of maturity in modern Japan, and Whyte's (1997) explication of how misfortune is made sense of in Uganda are all very complex discussions of well-being and what it means in different social milieu, despite the fact that these books hardly use the term.

Why are anthropologists so leery of examining well-being? Thin fully explores this question in chapter 1, but let us offer a preliminary answer here. Largely this is because well-being, as an analytic rather than an ethnographic term, tends to be used much more by social scientists than by a given people themselves in describing their lives; but it is the latter that anthropologists have generally focused upon in their ethnographic portrayals. Many anthropologists have tended to shy away from cultural comparison and evaluation, insisting on respect for the values of a particular people, and arguing that the values and meanings of any sociocultural system should be seen in their own context. Thus, anthropologists may simply dismiss the study of well-being. This position is understandable, but in effect it renders anthropologists no more than naysayers. Economists, public health specialists, and psychologists engage in the cross-cultural comparison of well-being, however flawed their modes of comparison may be. If anthropologists merely say that such comparison is impossible and add nothing to the cross-cultural examination of well-being, then they are shutting themselves off from the effort to create cross-cultural comparisons of well-being. This is

despite the fact that the complex local knowledge of anthropologists could make such comparisons more nuanced and thus more valid.

Underlying the anthropological emphasis on ethnography in all its specifics is the discipline's long history of cultural relativism. Cultural relativism is the belief that societies should not be evaluated in terms of a transcultural scale of evaluation, but taken on their own unique terms. As Melville Herskovits, a leading anthropological theorist of cultural relativism, once wrote, "there is no way to play this game of making judgments across cultures except with loaded dice" (1958, 270; quoted in Perry 2003, 169). This attitude is engrained in anthropology; introductory anthropology classes often advocate cultural relativism as an ultimate value, with ethnocentrism and judgment of other societies' cultures seen as the greatest of anthropological evils. In the late 1980s and 1990s, postmodernism took this view even further, arguing, in at least some scholars' views, that it is impossible to understand anything that occurs outside one's own culture: "the other" is impenetrably other, and objective knowledge is but a delusion.

There has been a minority of anthropologists who do engage in extensive cross-cultural research, focusing not on cultural difference but on human universals (Brown 1991). But as earlier noted, most anthropologists do not use experience-far concepts purporting to be universal, but instead use experience-near concepts in their analyses, the concepts used by their informants. This affects the anthropological analysis of well-being. Societies studied by anthropologists may have no concept of well-being, and the term may make no sense to the members of such societies. Instead, there may be a native term with different resonances, as several of the chapters of this book reveal, or no term at all. Anthropologists who study well-being may need, at least to some extent, to go beyond cultural relativism; they need at least implicitly a comparative perspective to make their analysis of well-being possible. But this has been far from the anthropological mainstream.

However, as previously mentioned, anthropologists have not been entirely absent from the topic of well-being, and have discussed issues of human well-being and ill-being. One example is Robert Edgerton, who writes in his book *Sick Societies* (1992) about groups of people who fail to survive as populations, who have harmful institutions, and whose practices impair their physical and mental health. Although Edgerton is not discussing well-being for the societies he examines, he explores in great detail what makes a population "sick." He concludes that "the ability to distinguish what is harmful for human beings from what is beneficial to them should qualify as useful knowledge" (1992, 208), and that anthropology should produce such knowledge and such evalua-

tion. Another anthropologist who has considered issues of evaluation is Elvin Hatch, in his *Culture and Morality* (1983). Hatch writes: "Human well-being is not a culture-bound idea. ... Starvation and violence are phenomena that are recognized as such in the most diverse cultural traditions" (1983, 134). He argues for a humanistic principle that transcends cultural relativism: "We can judge that human sacrifice, torture, and political repression are wrong, whether they occur in our society or some other. Similarly, it is wrong for a person, whatever society he or she may belong to, to be indifferent towards the suffering of others" (1983, 135). Hatch acknowledges that his humanistic principle may be difficult to tightly define, but argues steadfastly for its existence, and the moral necessity for applying it.

Some anthropologists have been seen, however, as going to an extreme in their judgments; we may recall the writings of Colin Turnbull on the Ik (1972), in which he recounts with horror the various cruelties they inflicted upon one another. Appalled by the "nature" of this mountain people in Uganda, he recommended to the Ugandan government that the "ruthless," "loveless," and "miserable" Ik be relocated so that they would not starve to death, but also would not reproduce such an undesirable society. Many anthropologists reacted with outrage to such recommendations; indeed, most anthropologists have been extremely reluctant to write about the people they study in ways that could be construed as evaluations.

There also have been subdisciplines of anthropology that have specifically dealt with issues relating to well-being: these include psychological anthropology and medical anthropology. In the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s the Culture and Personality movement (which in the 1960s became known as psychological anthropology) came under fire, for it sought to characterize entire cultures and nations according to the personality types they exhibited, sometimes in effect pathologizing other cultures despite the cultural relativistic framework in which they wrote (Benedict 1934; Kardiner 1945). For example, Benedict characterized the Dobuans of Melanesia as "paranoid," the Pueblos as "Apollonian," and the Kwakiutl as "megalomaniacal." After much criticism based on the perceived lack of objectivity of research using psychiatric terms to characterize entire populations (see Spiro 1951; Shweder 1991), this paradigm lost much of its credibility. Shweder notes that "there is no reason to expect that the ways individuals differ from one another within any or all cultures have anything to do with the ways cultures differ from one another" (1991, 292)—differences between cultures are far more complex than these simple labels allowed. More careful comparative projects subsequently emerged, such as the Whittings with their *Chil-*

*dren of Six Cultures* project (1963, 1975), Edgerton (1971), and Korbin (1981)—studies that maintained a cross-cultural focus dealing with topics such as child abuse, birthing practices, and mental retardation. However, despite this research, which had extensive implications for the study of well-being, interest in cross-cultural research lost many of its followers and psychological anthropologists turned instead to such topics as shamanism, emotion, and cognition, as well as mental illness and pathology (Kleinman 1980).

More recently, another more specific approach within medical anthropology has begun to question the “underlying ideological assumptions of health,” addressing topics related to the cultural constructions of health that, in turn, set parameters for ideas about well-being (Adelson 2000; Blaxter 2004; Izquierdo 2005). Just as there are many ways in which well-being can be defined and measured, health is also culturally dependent. While objective measures are generally used in defining and measuring health, researchers recently have started to understand that subjective perceptions of a person’s life circumstances have a stronger impact than straightforward external circumstance: “The important factor in determining happiness ... is not how healthy you are, objectively, but rather how you feel about your health” (Baumeister 1991, 213).

This book represents the first time that anthropologists studying well-being in societies across the globe have been placed within the pages of a single volume; as such, it represents something new in the discipline. Most of its contributors are wedded to ethnography, and do not believe that anthropologists should offer wide-ranging moral judgments of societies. However, its contributors do believe that well-being can be ethnographically examined in a given society, and many believe that it can to some extent be compared across societies: not through “hard comparison,” the statistical data of psychologists and economists and others, but through “soft comparison,” on the basis of ethnography.

## The Chapters of This Book

Part One of this book offers two chapters broadly theorizing well-being and societal comparison as to well-being; Parts Two, Three, and Four turn to ethnography. Part Two’s three chapters consider well-being in small-scale societies on three continents, each facing the impact of the national state and of globalization. Part Three’s three chapters examine well-being in India, China, and Japan between state and culture, and between living for one’s group and living for oneself. Part Four’s three

chapters offer new frameworks for investigation, considering well-being physically, phenomenologically, and familiarly in Japan, Indonesia, and the United States.

This book includes contributions by many of the anthropologists in the world today working on the topic of well-being. They do not all speak in a unified voice. The book's chapters are notable for their diversity, not only in the societies they examine, but also in their differing ethnographic approaches to well-being. In particular, the theoreticians of Part One advocate the explicit comparison of societies as to well-being, a comparison that many of the ethnographers in Parts Two, Three, and Four do not fully believe in and do not practice. These ethnographic chapters themselves examine well-being from different vantage points, in accordance with the cultural concerns of the societies being examined, as well as the investigative interests of the anthropologist; they too are sometimes in implicit or explicit disagreement.

This book thus seeks not to set forth a programmatic schema for the investigation of well-being, which would be impossible given the current state of the field, but rather to open up new ground for the anthropological consideration of well-being as a valid and worthwhile topic to explore, both ethnographically and cross-culturally. This book seeks not to win converts to any particular research agenda, but rather to start conversations and get students and teachers of anthropology to think about a new area of investigation that is highly promising. The different viewpoints expressed in this book's chapters are intended to bring anthropological readers to think about the investigation of well-being in diverse ways, one or many of which may have relevance to their own research agendas. The diversity of approaches and viewpoints in this book is a strength of anthropology, we argue, in enabling well-being to be approached in a variety of ways, "stretching the investigative envelope" in contrast to the more codified and narrower approaches of other disciplines. We maintain that these different approaches and viewpoints can enable well-being to be more fully and complexly understood than it generally is at present.

Let us describe the chapters of this book in more detail. Part One offers a theoretical background to the anthropological study of well-being. It begins with Neil Thin in chapter 1 asking, "Why has anthropology ignored the study of well-being?" He explores the various reasons for this anthropological resistance, semantically parses the meanings of well-being in anthropological investigation, and then shows how the study of well-being can contribute to multiple areas of anthropology, arguing that anthropologists should explicitly engage in cross-cultural comparison in order to help make the world a better place. Chapter 2,

by Benjamin Nick Colby, asks, "Is a cross-cultural measure of well-being possible or even desirable?" concluding that it is indeed possible and desirable. He goes through a litany of reasons why anthropologists have avoided such a measure, and counters each of them in his arguments, emphasizing the idea that what is to be compared is not "cultures" but rather "self-world." Finally he offers a theoretical basis for the cross-cultural statistical measurement of "adaptive potential," his conceptualization of well-being. These two chapters offer moral and empirical arguments for the anthropological assessment and comparison of well-being. While the chapters in the remainder of this book offer a different approach, eschewing the "hard" comparison of societies as to well-being and practicing instead "soft" ethnographic examination, these two chapters do set the stage for the chapters to come, in giving broad and perceptive analyses of the relation of anthropology to well-being. These authors convincingly set forth the need for the study of well-being in anthropology, even if the particular paths into well-being that they advocate are roads not taken by the books' other authors.

The book's subsequent chapters, ethnographic in focus, begin in Part Two by exploring well-being in small-scale societies. Chapter 3, by Carolina Izquierdo, analyzes well-being among the Matsigenka of the Peruvian Amazon, considering how they conceive of well-being and struggle to maintain well-being in the face of the increasing encroachment of the outside world upon their lives, including the Peruvian state and especially multinational oil companies. She notes how, despite the fact that the Matsigenka's physical health is getting better by objective indicators, their senses of well-being are in drastic decline, as evidenced by an upturn in accusations of sorcery and a general fear of the future. Daniela Heil's chapter 4 considers well-being in an Australian Aboriginal community, looking at how people in that community formulate well-being in terms of their relationships with kin and immersion in networks of social obligations and responsibilities: this is described by the terms "being well," and also being "one of us." Heil contrasts the Australian government's individualistic concept of well-being with the Aborigines' relational concept of well-being, depicting the latter as a critique of the former. Chapter 5, by Naomi Adelson, explores the ways in which well-being among the Cree of northern Canada are both grounded in traditional beliefs and activities and changing with changing times. She argues that expressions of well-being are intrinsically tied to concepts of land, literally and symbolically, in Cree lives, but she also explores how the Cree are reinventing their senses of identity and also their senses of well-being as their society is transformed through increasing linkages to the outside world and the changing of generations.

These three chapters of Part Two show small-scale societies suffering through and responding to differing degrees of encroachment by the nation and world at large. Judging from these chapters, their different senses of well-being depend in large part on the degree of cultural autonomy they feel they can maintain in the face of this encroachment.

We then turn, in Part Three, to nation-states and their citizens between culture and state and between individual and group. Steve Derné, in chapter 6, examines well-being among young, middle-class Indian men, and finds that it is fundamentally based in a sociocentric cultural orientation, whereby young men would rather be guided by their fathers in their choice of marriage partner than make such choices on their own, apart from familial guidance. This orientation, based in Indian social structure, has been challenged by globalization, but remains intact, he finds. In chapter 7, William Jankowiak considers well-being between culture and the state in China, examining how Chinese senses of well-being have been transformed in the past twenty years, as the governing ideology has shifted from communism to capitalism. He finds that there has been an extraordinary increase in well-being, because of the expansions of the horizons of individual choice among the Chinese he interviewed, which most, although not all, experienced as a personal liberation. Chapter 8, by Gordon Mathews, looks at the Japanese term *ikigai*—“that which makes life worth living”—exploring its competing meanings in Japan in recent years, connoting both “living for one’s group” and “living for oneself.” He then defines it as a cross-cultural marker of well-being, and uses it to examine and compare the cultural formulations, social negotiations, and institutional channeling of the pursuit of a life worth living in Japan, the United States, and Hong Kong.

Several of the chapters of Part Three seem to contradict one another. While Derné’s Indian male informants desire not individual choice but familial guidance, Jankowiak’s Chinese informants rejoice at their newfound individual freedom. But comparing these chapters in more depth, we see that well-being as experienced within one’s group or within oneself is not only a matter of different cultural orientations in different societies, but also of state policies molding citizens in various ways. It is also a matter of universality, with human beings requiring both individual freedom and social relatedness in different social contexts, as these three chapters reveal in different ways.

We then turn, in Part Four, to new anthropological directions and frameworks for the examination of aspects of well-being in different societies. Chapter 9, by Scott Clark, considers well-being and physical pleasure in the context of the Japanese bath. He considers pleasure individually and universally, but focuses particularly on “the cultural

context of pleasure” through the settings, activities, and meanings involved in “bathing-Japanese.” Some aspects of this, he argues, can be experienced by outsiders, but other aspects can only be experienced by one fully immersed in the Japanese cultural context. In any case, anthropological analysis can enable a cross-cultural understanding of the cultural shaping of pleasure, he argues. Chapter 10, by Douglas Hollan, discusses well-being as contingent and subjective; it is experienced at the level of the individual on the basis of unconscious processes and the continual mapping of representations of one’s past onto the socio-cultural world of one’s present. Hollan defines this as “selfscape,” and thinks of well-being as the fit between selfscape and the physical and social world. He fleshes out these ideas in his portrayal of the selfscape of a Toraja man in highland Sulawesi, Indonesia, over the course of a day, in his familial ease as well as his fear of enemies and of magical attack. In chapter 11, Thomas S. Weisner examines well-being and family routines among American families with children with disabilities. Weisner defines well-being as “engaged participation in everyday cultural activities that are deemed desirable by a community.” He sees as key to well-being the idea of sustainability, the ability to continue routines despite the difficulties that may confront these families, as shown in his ethnographic vignettes. These three chapters present three different theoretical approaches and frameworks for the examination of well-being in contemporary societies—through physical pleasure, socially experienced, through the individual lifeworlds of selves in social worlds, and through the analysis of familial routines. While their approaches are culturally particular, they can be used in ways that transcend that particularity. These final three chapters point to the ethnographically based cross-cultural analysis of aspects of well-being.

The Conclusion sums up this book’s efforts: what can this book contribute to the examination of well-being? It outlines the arguments and questions raised by each of its four sections, and explores the “soft comparison” that the book’s ethnographic chapters offer, detailing how far such comparison might proceed. It also offers a preliminary framework for the examination of well-being, based on the physical dimension, the interpersonal dimension, and the existential dimension of human social life, as impacted by the national and global dimension. The primary value of this book, the Conclusion argues, lies in the ethnographic particularities of its chapters, showing the complex varieties of well-being that exist around the world. But beyond this, the book’s concluding pages map these varieties onto a common human framework, and point to at least the possibility of a broader, perhaps universal comparison of well-being.



## Notes

1. Veenhoven (in personal conversation with Mathews) has said that in his own and others' survey research on happiness, statistical analysis reveals that only a small degree ("no more than 20 percent") of variation between societies can be attributed to cultural factors. While we certainly do not claim that culture is everything—it is one of a number of important factors shaping well-being—to use survey results that may be culturally problematic to demonstrate that culture does not matter leads to the diminution of culture as a foregone conclusion. The situation is like that of the joke about a man searching for his car keys at night. He is asked, "Where did you lose them?" and points into the blackness: "Over there." "Well, why are you looking for them here?" "The light's better here." This is said with all due respect to Veenhoven, whose sociological contribution to the study of well-being and happiness has been enormous.
2. As Diener and Tov say in their review's abstract (2007, 691), "Well-being can be understood to some degree in universal terms, but must also be understood within the framework of each culture. ... There are pancultural experiences of SWB [subjective well-being] that can be compared across cultures, but ... there are also culture-specific patterns that make cultures unique in their experience of well-being." In this statement, unlike statements by psychologists in earlier publications, the authors sound similar to anthropologists in their arguments.

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