

To Govern Happily

Who is the new subject of happiness? Like other psychological person-ages, the happy subject is one for whom emotional well-being provides a category of identity, a biographical yardstick by which the passing of life is registered and interpreted. Indeed, such is the case for any member of that genus we know as psychological subjects. But the happy person is of a fundamentally different kind than the lunatic, neurotic, depressive, hysteric, and the paranoid—characters whose identities and life trajectories can be read in terms of the manifestations of their unique psychological anomalies. Such figures compose the teratology of what Foucault called the psy-disciplines—that network of asylums, specialists, and discourses that have, since the eighteenth century, served to consolidate formations of social power by maintaining a permanent externality to the normatively ordered population, one distinguished by unique qualitative distinctions, as the normal is from the abnormal. The subject of happiness is marked less by a state of exteriority than by a satiation and permeation of the interior of the normal population itself. As such, the notion of happiness draws on a certain egalitarianism characteristic of the enlightened West: as an expression of the psychobiological dynamic of human life itself, happiness is not an affliction or a deformity confined to the few, but is instead a future, a potential for the full development of a vital capacity shared by anyone and everyone. Indeed, the technology of happiness is best not practiced by the clinically depressed, deranged, or other persons marked for psychological marginalia (such individuals are referred back to the old disciplinary apparatus, which stands patiently on the sidelines for this purpose). Happiness is for the average, the common, the unafflicted—those who simply want more out of life.

The problem of happiness, therefore, is the perfect mechanism for inducing everyone into the psychological fold. It is the effect of a new scientific regard for emotional well-being understood less as a property of intrapsychic than of biological existence, one whose past owes more to genetic inheritance and neurochemistry than to the psychological imprint

left by significant others, repressed in childhood memory. And it is by this token that happiness is held up as a universally shared propensity, not just of the psychological, but of the biological subject. Happiness is, in a sense, the democratization of psychological life—one need no longer be sick to be psychological—though this is a form of democratization that brings with it many concealed and coercive effects. Anyone who falls short of the full realization of their happiness potential, happiness experts argue, has betrayed his or her own most implicitly human capacities. Not just unhappiness, but the failure to be as happy as possible, is inexcusable. Such is the blackmail of happiness: to choose not to be happy is to choose against oneself and against the mandate of biological life, what one is and what one might become, which is an unthinkable choice (one only possible for those afflicted, not necessarily with depression, but with the malaise of everyday pessimism). Thus, the effects of happiness extend far beyond the traditional domains of the therapist and the psychiatrist, wardens of those subjects whose states of compromised mental health, contorted by disease and maldevelopment, have long held the clinical gaze of the hospital and the asylum. Happiness is the problem for people who don't have a problem: it operates not as an abnormality one discovers within oneself through techniques of introspection and self-assessment in the closed spaces of clinics and asylums, but as a potential to be exercised in the open spaces and otherwise healthy moments of everyday life. Since the subject's encounter with happiness is confined to its own immediate and variable experience of everyday well-being (which is, of course, readily transparent to every psychological subject on a moment-to-moment basis), the problem of happiness speaks to the forward thrust of life itself, and to the subject's vitality and ultimate capacity for a richer, fuller, happier life. To seek after happiness is to empower oneself, in the sense that Barbara Cruikshank uses the term to signify a new technology of government and a mode of subjection that is at once voluntary and coercive: "The will to empower ourselves and others" writes Cruikshank "has spread across academic disciplines, social services, neighborhood agencies, social movements, and political groups, forging new relationships of power alongside new conceptualizations of power" (Cruikshank 1999, 72).

As such, happiness de-spatializes the closed categories of the psychological matrix: one can be happy (or not), not only in the hospital or the asylum, but at home, at work, in the mall, and not only in profound moments of self-realization, but in mundane practices of everyday existence. And this de-spatialization is accomplished through a leveling of the hierarchical ordering of the discourses of psychology itself, a blurring of expertise

and laity, projecting a therapeutic endeavor that reaches to the remotest areas of the population and personal life. Just as anyone, the healthy and the sick, can be happy, so anyone, from the trained psychologist to the blogger to the self-schooled life coach can pronounce on happiness and on the methods best applicable to its realization. But most importantly, within the discourse on happiness, de-spatialization, democratization, and empowerment occur through a unique temporalization of the problem of psychological health itself. The uncertain status of happiness appeals to the unfolding dynamic of a vital process, grafting itself onto the time of our life trajectories and everyday conducts, fusing with the forward thrust of our life energies, charting a future, a hope, a potentiality, and a horizon of endlessly optimizing capacities and endlessly enriching experiences. This is not the temporality of the psychotherapist or the analyst, who searches the past for the buried causes of present dilemmas and prescribes a cure as the fixed aim of treatment. It is a temporality that looks to an open future of ongoing possibilities, that strategizes and seeks opportunities for ever greater utility and higher emotional returns on life's investments. Today's happiness is the temporality of enterprise.

To ask oneself if one is happy (as citizens of liberal democratic societies inevitably do, and do so repeatedly) is to ask if one is happy yet. It is to render life accessible to a set of quantifiable measures (How happy am I?), whose maximization is purely a problem of the successful management of this-worldly circumstances (How can I make myself happier?), and which might become better managed in the future (When will I be more happy?). Happiness asks us to train our eyes on a horizon of possibility and to pose the problem of our lives and our identities within an engineered trajectory of measurable risk and uncertainty, a cost-benefit analysis whose unfolding is directed by our own competencies, capacities, resources, and choices, leading to the uncertain realization of our potential for happiness. Happiness reflects a "technicization" of well-being, to be sure, but it is the most satiating kind of technicization, one that operates entirely without technocrats, for it is the individual himself who is the CEO of his own happiness. In this way, happiness reconstitutes identity and emotional well-being as a problem, not of a search for origins, but of environmental resources, opportunities, and enterprises confronted in the here and now of personal life. Moreover, happiness, as life lived to the fullest, applies a maximizing logic to those vital forces that define the very dynamism of our biological existence. Happiness is what we experience when our life forces are fully activated—to deny happiness is to deny what we are as living entities. For this reason, I will argue, the new discourse on happiness effects an intensification of the apparatus

of the psy-disciplines, a shedding of its heavy institutional form enabling a penetration of power that goes beyond our bodies and behaviors, to touch on our very potentialities, futures, and temporalities as subjects.

Happiness as Potentiality

Empirically, it is possible to speak of the new discourse on happiness on a number of levels, not all of which cohere into a single genre. This new discourse is singularly interdisciplinary, spanning scientific, economic, policy, journalistic, and popular cultural genres, all of which exert a combined influence on lay and popular understandings that have become the stuff not only of business theory and self-help wisdom, but daytime talk shows, cable TV programs, and a burgeoning therapeutic cottage industry and subculture. Typically, the new happiness discourse espouses a view of emotional life filtered through the lens of economic thought, as in the influential works of Richard Layard, whose colorful global surveys of the happiness levels of countries across the world pique the curiosity of the most casual reader (Layard 2005). Indeed, Layard's findings have proven influential, not only to a lay readership, but at the highest levels of government in some countries, influencing policy discussions in Britain, the United States, and Australia.

More precisely, it is a specific and unique formation of economic thought that inscribes the discourse on happiness with its distinctive logic, and gives it its singular, penetrating character. This is a contemporary discourse on the economic that makes broad claims for the implicitly opportunistic character of social, personal, and emotional existence as a unique enterprise—a neoliberal thought that has, as discussed in the introduction to this study, become increasingly hegemonic in civic and public discourse, as well as private and interpersonal life, while an older tradition of economic and social thought rooted in Keynesian welfarism has waned in its influence. The story of this shift can be described: where once political and economic discourse projected an overarching faith in an implicit human collectivism and in the capacity of states to manage social provisioning, regulate markets, and collectivize social risks under economies centrally planned around the shared needs for trust, reciprocity, and mutuality, today it is the need to foster the freedom of economic actors from these collective forms, to incentivize enterprising conduct, and to responsibilize individual economic risk taking that forms the nexus of governmental policy (Harvey 2005). “Whereas under Keynesian welfarism,” writes Wendy Lerner “the state provision of goods and services to a national population was understood as a means of ensur-

ing social well-being, neo-liberalism is associated with the preference for a minimalist state. Markets are understood to be a better way of organizing economic activity because they are associated with competition, economic efficiency and choice” (Lerner 2000, 5). Moreover, there is within the logic of neoliberal government a specific and operative incompleteness, the quality of a problem or a problematization that is central to its functioning, and crucial to the present analysis. To apprehend this quality, we must take up the logic of neoliberalism not just as one of government, but of governmentality in the full sense.

The governmentality approach applied to the practice of neoliberalism is one that cuts across distinctions between ideology and policy to uncover the political rationalities that operate within each field, and specifically the ways in which these rationalities translate into specific practices for the self-government of neoliberal subjects (Lerner 2000; Harvey 2005). Yet neoliberal governmentality should not be equated with either of its significant historical antecedents: classical liberalism and social welfarism. Where under classical liberal government the aim was to foster subjects capable of entering into relations of exchange, and the aim of social government was to create cohesion, integration, and social trust within a population subjected to the centrifugal effects of a capitalist restructuring, neoliberal government’s methodology is uniquely negative, seeking to dispel social dependencies in the hope of activating an agentive, entrepreneurial, and enterprising spirit among its subjects. In short, neoliberal governmentality seeks to replace the subjects of exchange, adjustment, and reciprocity with one of opportunity, enterprise, and calculative self-interest. Moreover, the apparatus by which this change is effected is uniquely minimal: without acting directly on subjects, neoliberal government seeks to incite a set of specific transformations through the intentional curtailing of the apparatus of government itself, thereby effecting an indirect manipulation of the background conditions for individual conduct. Neoliberal policies typically involve the restriction of state provisions through budgetary measures designed to give subjects no choice but to adopt enterprising methods, imposing a view of the social field etched in the image of a market abundant with resources, opportunities for mutually beneficial exchanges, and competitive advantage realizable through enterprises of calculation and investment. Incentivization, responsabilization, privatization, marketization, and “desolidarisation” (Hartmann and Honneth 2006, cited in McNay 2008)—all signify a process of induced vitality through the self-limitation of a government that operates only indirectly and at considerable distance from its intended objects. The effect is one of excitation and empowerment of subjects through the removal of the

constraints imposed by hierarchical institutions, and the social commitments they claim to represent. Neoliberalism is, by this token, a quintessentially productive power; it “makes live” by drawing individuals into the competitive production and maximization of their own unique attributes.

In his lectures of 1978–79, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, Foucault takes us some distance down this road through his analysis of neoliberal thought in the work of Friedrich Hayek and the Ordoliberals and also in the more recent writings of Gary Becker and the economists of the Chicago School (Foucault 2008). His survey was necessarily general, and his treatment of neoliberalism did not attain the richness of his earlier studies, remaining focused, as it did, on its intellectual vanguard without extending to the practical texts and minor authors through which a rationality of government is disseminated. Yet he exposed the dynamic of neoliberal thought, and pointed to the ways in which a rationality of neoliberal rule becomes possible. In his discussion of the German postwar liberalism of the Ordo School, for example, Foucault described how the challenge facing liberalism in the aftermath of World War II was not to carve out a space of freedom within an existing state, as it was for classical liberalism (Foucault 2008, 183–85). Neither was the task of neoliberalism to emancipate a generic propensity for free economic conduct, one viewed as natural to human social life. Instead, the task was to devise a state capable of creating, through its own programs and initiatives, the voluntaristic, entrepreneurial and self-responsible dispositions upon which market forms depend. In other words, freedom became, for neoliberals, a specific project of government. For the neoliberals, neither the market nor the competitive conducts upon which market rationality draws were *sui generis* features of social life; they had to be actively fostered through the interventions of a neoliberal state, whereby individuals were brought to cultivate an entrepreneurial style within their own modes of conduct.

From this perspective, neoliberalism was seen to invert problems long attended to by the agencies of Keysianism and the welfare state; against the Schumpeterian orthodoxy whereby monopolistic tendencies of capitalism were regarded as an intrinsic consequence of capitalism’s own economic logic, Ordo liberals considered barriers to individual competition to be a fundamentally social problem, open to forms of social intervention that target tendencies toward collectivism and interdependency by purposefully creating the background conditions that necessitate competitive conducts (Foucault 2008, 185). Blockages to economic activity originating in the social fabric could be disaggregated through programs of state intervention, aimed at suppressing collectivism and stimulating entrepreneurial, market behaviors.

Practices of neoliberal governmentality extend these interventionist strategies into the social field, but also into the very domain of subjectivity itself, where, as Graham Burchell has put it: “Neo-liberalism seeks in its own ways the integration of the self-conduct of the governed into the practices of their government and the promotion of correspondingly appropriate forms of techniques of the self” (Burchell 1996, 29–30).

Neoliberal governmentality thus defines a problem-space for distinct modes of experimentation and intervention, wherein society is undone, transformed in the image of the market, and what Burchell terms an “artificial competitive game” is imposed through the planned minimization of any collectivist alternative to individual competition. The net effect of this is the activation of a distinct range of human potentials and possibilities—the production of a certain neoliberal subjectivity (Burchell 1996, 27). Indeed, the worst consequence of the welfare state’s constraining of the possibilities for individual enterprise is its failure to enable the realization of vital potentials among those it governs—potentials for qualitative differentiation among a populace through the competitive pursuit of opportunities realizable in the terrain of the unfettered marketplace. But for the subject capable of extracting himself from such dependencies (and, conversely, of extracting such inclinations to dependency from himself), the reward comes with the freedom to undertake life as an enterprising endeavor, to take up his own self-cultivation as an enterprising program, and therefore to invest in himself as would an entrepreneur—on the basis of calculations of investment and return. This figure defines the utopian horizon of neoliberalism, one that Foucault uncovers in the economic thought of American neoliberal thinkers and in the work of the Chicago School economists, for whom neoliberalism was not a simple economic theory, but embraced “a whole way of being and thinking” (Foucault 2008, 218). These proponents, Foucault argues, shared with Hayek the sense that liberalism lacked a utopian horizon such as that possessed by socialism, and that it must therefore be reconceived as a “general style of thought, analysis, and imagination,” with the enterprising subject at its core (Foucault 2008, 219).

Neoliberal governmentality, therefore, is a term for the problematization of the role of government in a society conceived on the model of market practice, and the reshaping of individual conduct in the image of economic enterprise. The curtailing of the involvement of the state in the lives of individuals has the specific effect of summoning them to take responsibility for their own well-being—an effect Mitchell Dean terms “reflexive government” or the “government of government” (Dean 1999). And most importantly, the government of government that constitutes the neoliberal program is

one that directs the individual, through the curtailing of that apparatus of support enabled by the welfare state, to assume a specific responsibility for the government of herself. For this purpose, central to any apparatus of neoliberal governmentality are those languages or critical frameworks through which individuals reflect back upon themselves, assess themselves for their potentials and aptitudes for independent conduct, and work to optimize their freedom as self-responsible actors. The inscription of reflexive self-work as a task centered on the undoing, limiting, or destruction of an inherited dependency is a subjective competency that enables individuals to exercise their own capacity for autonomous action.

In this way, happiness is neoliberal. There is an underlying economic logic that runs through the government of happiness that resonates with the worldview of neoliberal economics and disseminates languages and frameworks mandating a program of reflexive self-government. This is a relation to the self centered on the stripping away of inherited interdependencies and embedded habits formed around mutuality and reciprocal obligation, and the excitation of a previously suppressed spirit for opportunistic action and entrepreneurship. The current discourse on happiness serves as such a framework through which individuals undertake to problematize aspects of their own conduct, to expunge inherited dependencies in order to optimize personal autonomy and a capacity for self-interested initiative. Dependence on the supervision of experts, the propensity to thoughtlessly adhere to institutional protocols, a tendency toward idleness or docility, reliance on habitual behaviors shaped in consort with patterned collective life, an overinvestment in the judgment of others, or a predisposition to conceive responsibility in collective terms—all are regarded as problematic and cumbersome, as a retardation of the spirit for life, and as a result of the overextension of some other vast regime of (welfarist, social) government, and therefore as an obstruction to the voluntaristic, self-interested, enterprising conduct that is the wellspring of (neoliberal) happiness itself. Indeed, the economism of happiness lies in the very negation of the dependent, constraining, and docile attitude that is the legacy of welfare. But if inflections of *homo economicus* lend an implicit coloring to the contemporary form of happiness, it is without a doubt the work of maverick psychologists and therapists that have shaped its visible, public profile.

With positive psychology, personal happiness has achieved the highest level of transparency and plasticity as an object of positive science, clinical intervention, and therapeutic manipulation (Gable and Haidt 2005). Following the publication in 2000 of Martin Seligman's *Authentic Happiness: Using the New Positive Psychology to Realize your Potential for Lasting Fulfillment*,

positive psychology has mushroomed into a multibillion dollar research field and influential self-help discourse, infusing the (detached) prefix “positive” to everything from couples therapy, education, and marketing to law enforcement and corrections. In each of these scenarios, the new “positive” psychology is registered as the active, agentive, and enterprising counterpart to what it considers traditional psychology, ensconced as it is in the negativity of the disease model, in endless reflection on past relations with others, and in all that makes life a scene of suffering. In the case of positive psychology life coaching, for example, the vocation of the psychotherapist, who mollifies sadness and suffering through patient listening and probing questions, is scorned for stagnating emotional life in the mire of remote and indistinct psychic traumas and heavy-handed expert intervention. In her place the semiprofessional coach engages the patient, not so much through a diagnosis of past traumas as through an inspiring reflection on the future as a scene of happiness and self-designed life goals (Brock 2008).

Positive Psychology

Positive psychology is a realm of expertise that has achieved broad professional acceptance in academic, public policy, and business circles, and in the space of the past decade, it has left a deep imprint on a range of popular therapeutic fields. In positive psychology, personal happiness has achieved the highest level of transparency and plasticity as an object of positive science, clinical intervention, and therapeutic manipulation (Gable and Haidt 2005). The aim of positive psychology is to make people happy with the aid of the most current psychological knowledge and methods. Aiming to surpass the traditional preoccupation of the psychological professions with negative states (neuroses, psychoses, disorders of various kinds), positive psychology maps out, with the same measure of scientific precision applied to mental pathologies, the psychological states identified with joy, flourishing, expressive well-being, and happiness itself. It is possible to date the origin of positive psychology to 1997, when Martin Seligman, renowned for his work on depression and adaptive behavior and recently elected to the presidency of the American Psychological Association, joined forces with Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, noted psychologist and originator of the concept of “flow,” the state of contemplative immersion one attains in an all-consuming activity (Ruark 2009). Both sought to redress the traditional preoccupation of American psychology with familiar problems of disease, pathology, and mental illness through a novel research agenda concentrated

on those conditions that make individuals thrive and attain states of happiness. With the intent of overcoming the vagaries and methodological flimsiness that had hampered previous efforts to treat the positive potentials of human well-being (particularly those identified with the humanistic psychology of Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers), happiness, the two argued, could now be measured objectively and scientifically through empirical clinical research, and controlled through precise therapeutic techniques. Buoyed by their conversations, Seligman resolved to make positive psychology the theme for his tenure as president of the APA, and within a few years, the field had exploded.

Since the publication in 2000 of Seligman's best-selling work *Authentic Happiness*, the undisputed Holy Writ of this expanding field, the new discourse on happiness has developed into a dynamic cultural phenomenon, earning repute both within academic psychology and in a variety of applied fields from business and public policy to the heady world of self-help publishing (Seligman 2000). The creation of the Templeton Prizes in Positive Psychology, two special issues of the *American Psychologist*, a number of handbooks devoted to the topic, several summits, and a major international conference all occurred within five years of the initial conversations between the field's founders. And in the decade since the publication of Seligman's book, positive psychology has consolidated its hold on academic psychology. Competitive programs in positive psychology have been established at the University of Pennsylvania, Harvard University, and the University of East London; Csikszentmihalyi himself has founded a new PhD program in positive psychology at Claremont University, and course offerings in positive psychology have become the norm in leading departments worldwide. Financial support for research has also grown rapidly: in addition to recent infusions of support from the National Science Foundation and the U.S. Department of Education, funding in excess of \$226 million has been provided to positive psychology researchers by the National Institute of Mental Health (Ruark 2009; Wallis 2005). In addition to the \$200,000 prizes it has awarded annually since 2000 for new research in positive psychology, The Templeton Foundation recently offered Seligman a six million dollar grant to encourage collaborative research across the fields of positive psychology and neuroscience.

The new discourse on happiness has influenced a range of institutional, managerial, and policy conversations, variously centered on the government of individuals, communities, and organizations through appeals to their capacity to feel good about their situations by perceiving them positively. Happiness results from the cognitive outlooks of individuals: to the extent

that people can be brought to assess their situations and themselves in a favorable light, the resulting emotional flush will move them to perform on such a superior level as produce results that actually confirm this initial positive assessment. The task, then, is to create the conditions, or to teach the specific techniques, through which circumstantial optimism and appreciative self-regard can be intentionally cultivated by individuals within their own outlooks. Significantly, this is not undertaken through a treatment regimen, counseling, or any therapeutic practice requiring the supervision of an institutional expert of any kind. The cultivation of a positive outlook is the handiwork of an organizational leader having no special background in psychology, who inspires the self-motivated individual to undertake a set of exercises and interventions into his own mundane thought processes. One example of an institutional application of positive psychology is that of “positive education,” developed by Seligman at the Center for Positive Psychology at the University of Pennsylvania, which has since been adopted by schools in the United States, Britain, and Australia (Waite 2007; Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich, Linkins 2009). Rather than castigating students for their weaknesses and flaws, the curriculum asks students to identify their unique strengths and assets, and includes specific methods by which students might cultivate and sustain this self-regard in their own lives, such as a lesson that concludes with end-of-the-day gratitude reflections designed to enhance positive outlooks.

Another version of this comes with a program adopted by high schools and universities called Strengthquest. (www.Strengthquest.com) Principally available to students as an online service, Strengthquest leads students through a three-stage process of appreciative self-assessment meant to establish an attitude of purposeful learning sustaining through their educational trajectory, with the assumption that a learning outlook founded on the student’s strengths, and not her weaknesses, will enable a positive outlook that will enhance student performance all around. “Of course, this positive approach contrasts with the traditional approach of education, wherein students are explicitly and implicitly taught that they must ‘fix’ their deficiencies, and if they do not, they are flunked” (Snyder and Lopez 2007, 393–94). The program begins by having students take an assessment composed of 180 questions identifying their natural strengths and talents in such thematic areas as “Activator” (“People strong in the Activator theme can make things happen by turning thoughts into action. They are often impatient”); Competition (“People strong in the Competition theme measure their progress against the performance of others. They strive to win first place and revel in contests.”); as well as Empathy, Focus, and Belief (“People strong in the

Belief theme have certain core values that are unchanging. Out of those values emerges a defined purpose for their life”) (55). Of the thirty-four possible themes available, students select five that identify their fundamental strengths. Next, they complete a workbook (either online or in print) titled “Discover and Develop Your Strengths in Academics, Career, and Beyond,” through which their unique signature strengths are explored in greater depth. A third exercise directs them in crafting an educational and professional future suitable to those strengths, and helps them to integrate a full knowledge of these strengths into their personal identities and self-perceptions. “Not only do students recognize their talents, they also increasingly begin to ‘own’ them” (Snyder and Lopez 2007, 395). And therein lies the happy moment: ownership of (positive) strengths, in place of the acknowledgment of (negative) deficits, is the occasion for an emotional uplift, through which the world is grasped in a new light—as one of openness, possibility, and opportunity. In short, Strengthquest, and other technologies associated with positive education, induce students to view themselves and their own characterological and affective states as “strengths,” or as resources with specific bearing on the future, and to act aggressively upon themselves to cultivate and mobilize these strengths, all in the spirit of happiness. The constant reminding of oneself of the potency and potential of this resource induces an optimism that brings one to view one’s environment as a field of opportunity—a cognitive stance that generates concrete performance enhancements.

In a similar spirit, business has welcomed positive psychology and incorporated its appreciative regard for the positive functions of organizations and enterprises as a tool for management: the business school at the University of Michigan in 2002 created a program in Positive Organizational Scholarship, and in 2004, Case Western Reserve University opened a similar program in Positive Organizational Development. Business leaders are taught to view the potentials and assets of organizations and their staffs, while imparting to workers small techniques for the enhancement of such appreciative outlooks, woven into the patterns of their daily rounds. These range from keeping records of their own and others’ professional accomplishments to the ritual acknowledgment, at the start of staff meetings, of organizational successes and strengths. Graduates from these programs have brought the assets of positive psychology to firms such as Ann Taylor Stores and Toyota Motor (Hamburg-Coplan 2009). Even the U.S. military has incorporated positive psychology methods into its basic training courses, instructing soldiers to direct their thoughts to positive interpretations of events when, for example, a call is placed from the battlefield to one’s spouse, who appears to be away from home on a weekend or evening (she’s not hav-

ing an affair; she's working late or gone shopping). In short, happiness is a resource with unlimited organizational value, a link between the present and the future, and is therefore worth cultivating in the emotional dispositions of students, soldiers, workers, prisoners, spouses, and in the general population.

Perhaps most impressive, however, is the success of positive psychology as a popular cultural and media phenomenon. Regional and national happiness rankings have proven eye-grabbing media fare for readers and viewers worldwide, and a 2005 *Time Magazine* cover story on positive psychology, declaring it the "science of happiness," expanded public curiosity on this phenomenon (Wallis 2005). Professor Tal Ben-Shahar's positive psychology class (from which he developed materials for his best-selling book *Happier: Learn the Secrets of Daily Joy and Lasting Fulfillment*) was, for a time, publicly celebrated as the most popular class at Harvard University (Ben-Shahar 2007). And on the self-help shelves, dozens of titles brandishing the scientific credentials of the new psychology strive to set themselves apart from the mushier offerings of self-help and new age gurus: a cover story in *Psychology Today* reports that, while in 2000 only fifty new popular nonfiction titles addressed the topic of happiness, by 2008 that number had grown to four thousand (Flora 2009). Positive psychology has also had a dramatic impact on therapeutic practices outside professional channels: a Google search of such terms as *happiness* and *positive psychology* reveals a growing cottage industry of happiness coaches, consultants, and business visionaries who have turned to the positive psychology brand as the elixir for all that ails the modern organizational soul. In the face of online services, blogs, cable TV programs, counseling and management publications, and therapeutic circles, it is not an overstatement to speak of a happiness movement, with positive psychology at its leading edge.

Conceptually, the core elements of positive psychology are relatively easy to grasp, owing to the field's penchant for the popular psychology genre. Drawing on the legacy of humanistic psychology, positive psychologists refute the pessimism of the "adaptive" tradition, and focus on the life-affirming potentials, energies, and vital forces residing within the individual psyche. Carl Rogers, Abraham Maslow, and proponents of the movement for self-realization in the 1960s and '70s had argued for the need to evolve a therapeutic methodology and a style of interpersonal life that transcends the self-recrimination imposed on the individual by demanding social norms, and accepts unconditionally the qualities and character of individuals in a spirit of warmth and affirmation—what became known as client-centered psychotherapy (Froh 2004). Positive psychology is similar in its optimistic portrayal of happiness as a radiant personal potential and

the need to overcome negative self-assessments, although in this case the therapeutic task is radically disengaged from relations with others and turned over to the individual himself. The happy subject is taught to maximize happy emotions through the direct manipulation of his own thoughts understood as resources for the optimization of an emotional state—a characteristic positive psychology inherits from its other great forebear, cognitive behavioral psychology. Cognitivist approaches typically reverse the old Freudian axiom that thoughts are the expression of underlying emotional dynamics, which are themselves rooted in psychobiographical experiences. Instead, everyday thoughts are understood to determine emotional states, and where these thoughts can be directly manipulated by sheer acts of will (making oneself think about this or that), it follows that happiness can be produced by consciously directing one's thoughts to happy subjects, with the same intentionality one might pursue in a fitness regime. Positive psychologists provide reams of advice on how this is to be done: through thought interventions one learns to switch off negative patterns of thinking. These involve planned disruptions of routine mental habits, which forestall the cyclical downward spiral to adaptive emotional states that embed us in the rhythms of daily life. Indeed, together with new clinical methodologies for the specific measurement of emotional conditions, wide authority is granted to the individual for the adjustment and manipulation of a static condition—one's happiness, whose intensity can be determined numerically from moment to moment and by the simple and direct method of self-reporting—through the control of one's thoughts (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi 2000).

Moreover, positive psychology proposes specific methods for the enhancement, not just of states of positive feeling in real life (hedonic pleasure) but the deeper forms of happiness that derive from the exercise of our chief potentials and unique gifts as individuals (eudaimonic happiness). This kind of happiness, termed "authentic happiness" by Seligman, occurs when a particular set of psychological strengths and virtues unique to each individual are mobilized and put into operation in everyday activities: qualities such as courage, conviction and open-mindedness, whose development through practice in everyday life induces positive self-regard, and thus happier emotional states (Seligman 2000). Seligman recounts the process by which these qualities were arrived at in the development of positive psychology: together with a colleague, Seligman combed through the "basic writings of all the major religious and philosophical traditions . . . Aristotle, Plato, Aquinas, Augustine, the Old Testament, the Talmud, Confucius, Buddha, Lao-Tze, Bushido, the Koran, Benjamin Franklin . . ." (132) to track

the recurrence of distinctive positive traits. What emerged was a list of universally held “signature strengths,” which include Wisdom, Knowledge, Courage, Humanity, Justice, Temperance, and Transcendence. Seligman went on to catalog these qualities in what he termed the Character Strengths and Virtues Handbook, or CSV, which he proposes as positive psychology’s counterpart to the inventory of pathological states numbered in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) (Peterson and Seligman 2004; Maddux 2002).

At the foundation of positive psychology, then, is a deep belief in the incompleteness of the project of happiness itself, in the plasticity of emotional states, and in the opportunistic conduct of the happy subject as one susceptible to the suggestive power of optimistic and pessimistic thought. Negative emotional states derive from the perception of one’s own helplessness to make oneself happy, the inability to transcend one’s routines or an overdependence on the emotional patterns that develop from unexamined, shared, social life. Positive emotions, on the other hand, come with the embrace of one’s power to change one’s emotional well-being, and with the assumption of responsibility for those emotions. In the first case, one is unhappy, and believes that one cannot act to make oneself happy because one is too rooted in a way of life and in a set of dependencies on others, which makes one more unhappy. In the second, one brings oneself to see that one can escape the limits imposed by a socially embedded life by viewing people and situations, not as obligations or as externalizations of one’s own psychic predicament, but as resources for manipulation and optimization. This realization gives one a sensation of emotional exhilaration and forces a cognitive shift, which itself motivates action and brings about the very happier reality one had convinced oneself to believe in in the first place. Unhappiness is therefore synonymous with the inability to act on one’s own deriving from one’s acceptance of habitualized outlooks derived from others, tinged by inevitability. To the extent that one realizes that one can make oneself happy through one’s own actions, one becomes happy. Agency, enterprise, and responsibility for oneself are both the means for achieving and the very content of happiness itself—freedom as an attribute of individual conduct. The apprehension that happiness is within one’s reach is a perception that is realized through the taking of actions toward happiness. And by extension, the spiral of docility, resignation, dependence and the reluctance to see the world in ways that break away from the pack and therefore to act on one’s own signals, not only the absence of happiness, but the inhibition and retardation of the potential for happiness—the vital, enterprising life-spirit that is the wellspring of life’s activity, or freedom. Thus, the parallel between

positive psychology and neoliberal economic thought is clear: the docility of social dependence, and the negative thoughts that lull us into states of torpor, must be actively uprooted and transformed through an infusion of affirming optimism. Immobility and stasis are anathema to the happiness project. Psychologist Barbara Fredrickson conveys this anxiety around the inertia of dependence this way: “Gratuitous negativity can hold you hostage, as if you had cinder blocks tied to your ankles and a black hood pulled over your face. It can keep you so constrained and smothered that you are simply unable to flourish. But the good news is that you have what it takes to free yourself” (Fredrickson 2009, 159). The logic of happiness demands that the happy subject train her efforts on these obstructive objects (cinder blocks, black hoods, negativity itself) that suppress the agency and freedom that makes happiness possible. And this thing is found in the thoughts and habits that embed the individual in the mutualities that constitute patterned social life. Such is the productive effect of the discourse on happiness, whereby happiness is that emotional medium through which the freedom of the entrepreneurial subject is constituted. A short review of one typical text from the new happiness discourses puts these properties on display.

How to be Happy

In her best-selling self-help tract, *The How of Happiness*, Sonja Lyubomirsky, professor of psychology at the University of California, Riverside, defines the project of happiness as one that draws its credential from the expertise of the scientific profession while also empowering readers as lay practitioners of their own programs of therapeutic self-government (Lyubomirsky 2007). Lyubomirsky is precise in this regard: she proposes that a full 40 percent of our happiness is within our control. Using data from research on identical twins, she concludes that an additional 50 percent is determined by our genetic inheritance, while the remaining 10 percent is dictated by circumstance, such as a recent divorce or a financial windfall. The detailed program she lays out for the maximization of that 40 percent includes a range of techniques variously centered on daily mental patterns, whose gradual spiral toward negativity has to be intentionally and forcibly disrupted. These include a set of “happiness boosters” for use in a variety of treatments, such as the keeping of a “gratitude journal,” or the performance of regular altruistic acts, such as “visiting a nursing home, helping a friend’s child with homework.” Lyubomirsky’s theory is presented in the opening chapters of her book: she assumes that each of us has a certain “baseline” for

happiness, a genetic predisposition that cannot be modified. She calls this our set point. However, the possibility of advancing beyond our set point is conditional upon our own activities of emotional self-manipulation. These entail the intentional inflation and consolidation of “positive” feelings, but also the containment of that range of emotional options that exist at the opposite end of the spectrum to happiness: negative feelings, which constantly threaten to assert themselves, making us inactive and self-absorbed, and thus keeping us unhappy. Our progress above our set point is our happiness level, which can be determined by the measures provided in an instrument whose use is nearly universal throughout the field of positive psychology: the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire, a survey that includes twenty-nine scorable statements intended to profile a subject’s general level of happiness, such as “I am very happy” and “I find beauty in some things.” On a scale that runs from 1 to 6, Lyubomirsky reports, the average happiness score is 4.3. Importantly, in Lyubomirsky’s book, happiness and the activities that produce it are described in terms of an implicit cost-benefit analysis through which the return on the time one puts in is repaid in quantities of happiness. Indeed, even the value of happiness itself is measured through its utility; in a chapter titled “Why Be Happy,” Lyubomirsky describes the “fringe benefits” that come with happiness, such as an increase in social skills, energy, productivity at work, likeability by peers, resilience, and the capacity to earn money.

Happiness, therefore, is synonymous with the ability to act in pursuit of happiness. The zeal for life, or the willingness to act freely in pursuit of happiness, is both the method by which happiness is achieved and the medium through which it is experienced. The reluctance to believe in the potential for the individual to achieve happiness through her own actions is therefore symptomatic of the failure of happiness itself (pessimism, a condition that afflicts critics of the happiness discourse), a condition that expresses itself in a reluctance to act, an embrace of fatalism, and a consignment of oneself to the despondent state of mind from which negative feelings emerge. The barriers to happiness are, by this token, many, and their overcoming requires the happy practitioner to master a specific technology, not only of emotional, but of cognitive and intellectual life. To let slip one’s belief in the possibility of happiness is to open the door to negativity and the spiral of despondency. Most of the problems that obscure the path to elevated happiness levels come in the form of a reluctance to act on one’s own, to dwell upon the deficits and historical constraints that define one’s situation instead of considering its implicit opportunities and potentials, or to settle into unreflective routines in which creativity is extinguished. This

tendency is inevitable: the law of “hedonic adaptation” dictates that even the best of circumstances ultimately diminishes in its power to energize or to produce happiness, and for this reason one’s relationship to one’s environment must be continually stirred, refreshed, and broken up through the implementation of an ongoing happiness program. Once we set aside our genetic predisposition and our circumstances, the 40 percent remaining is determined specifically by this willingness to overcome the blindness of routine and hesitation, cognitive docility, and the habits of life, to regard life’s opportunities and to act in the interest of our own satisfactions. Lyubomirsky writes:

In a nutshell, the foundation of happiness can be found in how you behave, what you think, and what goals you set every day of your life. There is no happiness without action. If feelings of passivity and futility overcome you whenever you face up to your happiness set point or to your circumstances, you must know that a genuine and abiding happiness is indeed within your reach, lying within the 40 percent of the happiness pie chart that’s your guide.

Barriers to action come in many forms, among them a tendency to withdraw into one’s private thoughts. Negative thinking, or what Lyubomirsky calls “rumination,” is an obstruction on the road to happiness, and must be specifically avoided. In “Happiness Activity no. 3,” readers are advised to “avoid overthinking”—that activity that distracts us from spontaneous investment in life and immersion in the “flow” of activities, and inevitably drags us down, tangles us up, mires us, and suffocates the happy life. Her discussion of rumination is woven with references to a despicable dependence and passivity: being stuck, sinking into thoughts, burdened with pessimism, obsessively returning to the same thoughts without progress. Uprooting this tendency demands the imposition of a specific emotional regimen, illustrated by the “stop technique”: “You think, say or even shout to yourself, ‘Stop!’ or ‘No!’ when you find yourself resuming overthinking. . . . Use your intellectual powers to think about something else—like your shopping list or what you will say when you call the plumber on the phone or the steps you need to take in planning your next vacation” (120). Rumination is part of a larger cluster of mental habits through which the effect of hedonic adaptation creeps in: the gradual erosion of happiness levels as novelty becomes routine, and as enterprise becomes dependence. Happiness levels increase most measurably when we act opportunistically, discover new things and new horizons, and are stimulated by new experiences, though ultimately we

become habituated, grow used to things, and our thoughts gradually settle into a negative pattern.

Indeed, implicit within this use of the law of hedonic adaptation is a subtle transformation that is not only characteristic of neoliberalism, but operates at the heart of the happiness discourse itself. The presence of others—spouses, friends, coworkers, or siblings—is fundamentally revalued. No longer the site of reciprocal obligations, cathexis, or the scene of mutual transference, others become pure resources in the project of personal and private happiness, possessing no more profound psychological importance than as a resource for the strategic pursuit of optimal emotional life. The author describes the case of Markus, a man who reports high levels of happiness in his marriage, because he has applied a set of techniques to offset the natural tendency toward habit formation and adaptation that occurs as the routines of domestic life set in.

Markus didn't want the effects of marriage to "wear off"; he didn't want to adapt to the rewards of marriage and take it for granted. So he decided to dedicate himself to be the best husband he could be and not take his wife and their relationship for granted. He consciously remembers to say "I love you," to bring her flowers, to initiate plans, trips, and hobbies, to take an interest in his wife's challenges, successes and feelings. (65)

What is striking in this passage is not just the distrust of a married life shaped around habits and shared routines (traditionally considered the wellspring of conjugal happiness and the chief objective of marital counseling), but the manner in which Markus's wife enters into the happiness equation. She is not present as another person, a partner in emotional life, as the object of psychological projection or of desire and aggression, but as an instrument for the maximization of Markus's happiness. While a century of psychological counsel had sought to resolve domestic tensions by mediating the interpersonal space of the conjugal bond (a program that extends the specific mandate of social government to enhance the bonds of collective membership and social dependencies within the nation-state), the spouse appears now as a pure environmental resource in the enterprise of the happiness entrepreneur. The relationship imperative requiring us to form habits of mutuality through the use of psychological expertise while seeking mutual understanding through shared introspection and self-discovery has been replaced by the mandate of self-generated happiness through strategic enterprise.

Moreover, the task of the new psychology of happiness and the program it imposes must be measured against that of the older therapeutic conventions it seeks to replace, or supplement. While what we might call “negative” psychology sought to foster adaptation and adjustment to normatively defined social conditions through enhanced self-understanding, reciprocity, and empathy, positive psychology is remarkably devoid—even contemptuous—of the therapeutic program as one steered toward adjustment and emotional give-and-take. It is as dubious of the activity of introspection valorized by dewy-eyed therapists and psychodynamic theories as it is of the priority of interpersonal relations celebrated in humanistic psychologies. From the standpoint of the new psychology of happiness, these conventions represent the overextension of a technology of psychological government that governs too much, saddling the individual with a social objective that ultimately benefits the therapist more than the client, and whose influence diminishes the prospects for freedom and self-responsibility. They are the hallmarks of an old technology of the psychological apparatus, whose aim was to foster reciprocity, adjustment to shared norms, mutual understanding, collective well-being, and social consensus through the mechanism of supervised introspection—the socializing goals of a set of psychologies employed by social government and the welfare state, which shaped the program of social psychology for much of the twentieth century. Against this tendency, happiness seeks, if not to govern less, then to govern at a distance. Happiness is a task, a regimen, a daily undertaking in which the individual produces positive emotional states just as a fitness guru shapes a selected muscle group. “We can all reap the full benefits of the Happiness Advantage if we work at it hard enough,” writes Shawn Achor, author of *The Happiness Advantage*. “Happiness is not just a mood—it’s a work ethic” (Achor 2010, 50). To govern oneself through the maximization of one’s potential for happiness is to govern oneself as a subject of neoliberal enterprise: agency, autonomy, freedom from regulative authority, and the cognitive wherewithal necessary for the pursuit of self-interest are metonymically aligned with the content of the new happiness itself.