

Chapter 2

Happiness, Culture and Relations of Power

The crux of this chapter will be to explore the relationship between happiness, well-being and culture. To that end, we shall examine the existent theories and empirical research about the connection between culture and happiness and try to identify the moments at which they could be criticized and complemented. Our central aim will be to question happiness and well-being as universal experiences and to suggest that they are culturally and historically specific/singular notions and experiences, the constitution of which is also closely connected to the workings of power.

Cross-National Measurements of Happiness and Culture

In spite of the fact that the complexity and magnitude of the empirical study of happiness has grown at a steady pace since the 1960s, it was only towards the end of the twentieth century that the field of happiness studies became increasingly interested in the relation between culture and happiness. Initial reflections on happiness in the context of culture have been predominately catalyzed by the methodological issues in cross-national empirical research on subjective well-being. Comparisons of reported levels of SWB between various national states could undoubtedly be regarded as one of the central issues in empirical research on happiness from its beginning in the 1960s up until now (Veenhoven 1997). Cantril's cross-national study on 'Pattern of Human Concerns,' for example, already included happiness as a variable in 1965 (see Cantril 1965). Cantril's research, and the majority of the numerous other comparative research studies of SWB that followed, addressed various methodological issues related to comparing happiness across countries such as sampling and the problems of measurement. It was not until the beginning of the 1980s that the influence of culture came to be seen as one of the possible methodological issues. Namely, Ostroot et al. (1981) analyzed the quality-of-life perceptions held by the inhabitants of two culturally different cities: Springfield Illinois, USA and Aix-en-Provence, France. The research of Ostroot et al. was certainly not the first to observe significant differences in levels of SWB across nations, but it was one of the first that clearly identified a methodological issue that later become designated as

the ‘cultural bias’ (Veenhoven 1991). The cultural bias implies that the comparative differences in the appreciation of life do not necessarily pertain to the actual differences between levels of happiness, but are rather a result of cultural variations that influence peoples’ perceptions of their well-being. Ostroot et al. (1981), and later Baumeister (1991), argued, for example, that a higher level of happiness reported by Americans could be connected to the fact that their culture places happiness much higher up on the list of values than the French. In other words, their cultural context encourages Americans to present themselves as happier than they actually are. Another methodological reservation posed by later research was that the survey-based measurement of happiness could be distorted in cultures that are less familiar with the concept or that have a significantly different concept of well-being (see Ouwenel and Veenhoven 1991, p. 2; Mathews and Izquierdo 2009, p. 8).

Growing discussions around the influence of culture on the measurement of SWB gradually turned cross-national comparisons of SWB into cross-cultural comparisons. A notable step in that direction has been the *Culture and Subjective Well-being* reader edited by Diener and Suh (2000). The main focus of the reader is the identification of differences in SWB between cultures/states. To that end, the authors examine cultural factors that influence SWB (e.g. Triandis 2000; Oishi 2000) and ‘ask whether specific societal conditions generally lead to SWB in the nations of the world’ (Diener and Oishi 2000). The authors also place much emphasis on methodological issues regarding different modes of survey-based cross-cultural comparisons of happiness, which include ‘the question of measurement,’ ‘issue of causality,’ problems with ‘defining and measuring the cultural and societal variables that predict well-being,’ ‘sampling,’ etc. (Diener and Suh 2000, pp. 5–8).

It is not unusual for researchers to employ different methods for the measurement of SWB across cultures¹. What is of far greater importance for our discussion is that authors working in happiness studies differ significantly in their perception of the degree of influence of culture on happiness. While in general (especially after the publication of *Culture and Subjective Well-being* reader) most of the authors in happiness studies acknowledge a certain connection between culture and happiness, they are certainly not univocal in their understanding about the nature and the extent of that relation (Diener 2007, pp. 693–695). Or, as Ryan and Deci (2001, p. 161) have put it: ‘researchers within the field of well-being are grappling with an issue that cross-cuts all social sciences, namely that concerning cultural relativism versus universals in human nature’.

Universal Notions of Well-Being and Culture

While there are two extreme positions on the connection between culture and happiness (one that sees happiness and well-being as universal—independent from culture—and the other that sees happiness as entirely culturally specific), the majority

¹ For more on different methods of measuring SWB across cultures, see Diener and Suh (2000, pp. 5–8) and Diener (2007).

of empirical researchers opt for the middle path, maintaining that some components of well-being are universal and the others, culturally specific (Diener 2007, pp. 693–695). In this sense, most of them would agree with Diener and Suh's (2000, p. 4) editorial in *Culture and Subjective Well-being*, which only perceives culture as one of the factors influencing SWB: 'SWB reflects to some degree how much people are living in accord with evolutionary imperatives and human needs, but also represents judgments based on the particular norms and values of each culture'.

We agree with Tiberius (2004), who argues that regardless of how they perceive the relation between culture and happiness, those researchers who are relying on survey-based cross-cultural comparisons of (subjective) well-being are assuming a universal notion of well-being on which they can ground their research. While Tiberius (2004, p. 293) and, according to her, 'most philosophers,' working in the area of well-being actually try to articulate and support such universal notions of well-being, we, on the other hand, will suggest that the ambition of philosophers and other theoreticians and researchers of well-being to 'clear the ground for a universal notion of well-being' (Tiberius 2004, p. 293) should not be accepted without scrutiny.

According to Tiberius (2004, p. 293), a formal philosophical project in the area of well-being that aims to formulate universal notions of well-being is not 'undermined by the kinds of cultural differences that have been discovered and that, therefore, there might be a universal notion of well-being'. Tiberius (2004) builds her principal argument solely on the basis of empirical cross-cultural SWB comparisons, which only 'discover differences in the causes, source, or perhaps even the components of well-being' (Tiberius 2004, p. 295). She argues that in order for such comparisons 'to proclaim that these are differences about well-being, they must presuppose an account of the nature of well-being that is the referent of a concept we share with other cultures' (Tiberius 2004, p. 295). As a consequence, Tiberius believes (2004, p. 295), cultural differences in the sources or causes of well-being do not undercut universal notions of well-being that are 'attempting to provide the criterion for what counts as a source or cause'. On the contrary, according to Tiberius (2004), SWB researchers need to assume such a universal notion and, consequently, 'defending such an account is one of the main projects of philosophers' working on the formal analysis of well-being.

We certainly agree with Tiberius that empirical survey-based cross-cultural comparisons of SWB do need to presuppose a universal notion of well-being. Moreover, we believe that Tiberius's argument is even more far-reaching, proving that actually any attempt to compare happiness or well-being across different cultures means that the researcher is knowingly or unknowingly assuming a universal notion of well-being. Without such an assumption, Tiberius rightly argues (2004, p. 295), 'Differences between goods pursued by various cultures could not be reported as differences that have to do with well-being'.

Yet, in our view, this is not enough to ultimately maintain a universal notion of well-being nor of happiness, with which well-being is usually equated within empirical happiness research. Namely, we shall argue that Tiberius's defense of universal notions of well-being is plausible only for as long as culture is perceived solely as influencing the causes and source of well-being. To that end, let us first take a closer look at the most recent insight into the connection between culture and

well-being from the so-called cultural perspective in happiness studies, on the basis of which we are going to build our argument on.

The Cultural Perspective in Happiness Studies

Authors with a background in cultural psychology that constitutes the so-called cultural perspective in happiness studies (like Kitayama and Markus 2000; Lu and Gilmour 2004; Uchida et. al. 2004; Pflug 2008) argue that the influence of culture reaches beyond the sources or causes of well-being. Rather, they comprehend culture in the broadest sense as ‘a particular way of life’ (Williams 1983, p. 90) and, consequently, do not only consider culture as one of the factors in the understanding of well-being and happiness, but rather as the cardinal factor: ‘culture can be a major force constructing the conception of happiness and consequently shaping its subjective experiences. In particular, members of different cultures may hold diverse views of happiness, covering definitions, nature, meaning and ways to strive for SWB’ (Lu and Gilmour 2004, p. 271). Of course, this does not mean ignoring factors like ‘evolutionary imperatives and human needs’ and ‘human nature’ (Diener and Suh 2000, p. 4, 5). Instead, even factors like evolutionary imperatives, human needs and human nature that might seem “natural” and “universal” are manifested in culturally specific ways:

Just as people cannot live in a general way and must of necessity live in some set of culture-specific ways, a person cannot just be well in a general way. The very nature of what it means to be well or to experience well-being takes culture-specific forms. What it means to feel good or to live a good life requires being able to realize culturally mandated ways of being (Kitayama and Markus 2000, p. 114, 115).

According to Kitayama and Markus (2000), and later also Lu and Gilmour (2004), the two compounds of SWB—“the subject/self” and “well-being”—that constitute any experience of happiness are not general, universal or ahistorical phenomena and experiences, but rather historically and culturally specific social constructions that are established through ‘cultural practices and meanings’ (Kitayama and Markus 2000): ‘The cultural perspective assumes that psychological processes—in this case, the nature and experiences of SWB—are thoroughly culturally constituted. Thus, culture and SWB are most productively analyzed together as a dynamic of mutual constitution’ (Lu and Gilmour 2004, p. 271). What, therefore, counts as well-being ‘depends on how the concepts of “well” and “being” are defined and practiced’ in a particular culture or a society (Kitayama and Markus 2000, p. 115). This means that ‘members of different cultures may hold diverse views of well-being, covering definitions, nature, meaning and ways to strive for SWB’ (Lu and Gilmour 2004, p. 271), where specific conceptions of happiness form specific experiences of happiness. Moreover, ‘culture also influences SWB in the way it gives shape and form to the self’ (Lu and Gilmour 2004, p. 272). Here, we have to note that the cultural construction of the self ‘is socially mediated, meaning that it occurs in conjunction with the construction of social relationships’ (Kitayama and Markus 2000, p. 114).

Besides the influence of culture on both the subject/self and the conceptions of happiness, there is also a mutual connection between the self/subject and SWB, meaning that 'the self stands at the junction of subjective well-being and culture. Culture provides 'form and shape to the self' and specific definitions of both 'well and being,' which in mutual influences produce how individuals feel and think about various aspects of their lives—the central research issue of SWB' (Suh 2000, p. 63). 'To the extent that the relevant social world is arranged and practiced differently, incorporating different cultural models of what is good, what is moral, or what is self,' Kitayama and Markus conclude (2001), 'well-being may assume forms other than those currently described and documented in the psychological literature'.

Claiming that well-being and happiness are culturally and historically specific phenomena does not imply that cultures are closed self-sufficient units independent from each other. On the contrary, cultures that directly or indirectly interact with each other always influence each other. The idea of so-called inter-cultural diffusion also holds in the case of happiness and well-being. Lu and Gilmour's (2004, p. 272) qualitative comparative research in Euro-American and Asian culture, for example, has clearly identified 'cultural fusion' in the field of well-being:

In a time of cultural fusion, people living in the collectivist East are learning to adopt cultural values, self-views, beliefs, attitudes and behaviors from the West. Consequently, they may now subscribe to both individual and socially oriented conceptions of SWB, and have access to both Eastern and Western repertoires of striving for SWB. A parallel trend in the individualist West in the opposite direction may be less salient due to a certain asymmetry in cross-cultural impact, not least because the very nature of core values at issue inclines Westerners to impact more aggressively on their environment, including other cultures.

Here, it is important to add that according to the cultural perspective, the cultural construction of happiness is not only culturally specific, but also historically specific, for both the self/subject and cultural conceptions of happiness are 'grounded in historically nurtured ideologies and religious ideas' (Uchida et al. 2004, p. 227). As a consequence, an analysis of the cultural constitution of experience of happiness has to also include 'the history of the culture' (Kitayama and Markus 2000, p. 114) in which it is grounded. Such a historical analysis was demonstrated by Lu and Gilmour (2004), who argued that Asian conceptions of SWB are largely marked by 'Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist' historical influences, whereas the Euro-American conceptions are marked by their Christian legacy.

Ethnocentrism and Universal Notions of Well-Being

Taking the cultural perspective into account, it is possible to claim that Tiberius's arguments for a universal notion of well-being are plausible for only as long as the analysis of the relation between culture and well-being remains limited to empirical survey-based cross-cultural comparisons that indeed are only capable of discovering cultural differences in causes and sources of well-being. Insofar as empirical cross-cultural research on well-being fails to identify and explain the nature of

well-being, Tiberius believes that it has to be established by philosophers who formulate it as a universal notion of well-being. However, Tiberius (2004, p. 301) also rightly acknowledged that ‘more dramatic differences’ identified by cross-cultural research in well-being ‘would be evidence that the two words we thought referred to the same concept (of well-being L.Z.), in fact refer to two different things’. As we have seen above, a cultural perspective that combines qualitative empirical evidence with theoretical analysis has revealed that the differences between cultures indeed are ‘more dramatic’ than discovered by quantitative SWB research and acknowledged by Tiberius (2004): ‘It is not that different things make people happy in different cultural contexts—that is obviously the case. More significantly, it is the ways of “being well” and the experience of well-being that are different’ (Kitayama and Markus 2000, p. 115). That is, ‘the very nature of what it means to be well or to experience well-being takes culture-specific forms’ (Kitayama and Markus 2000, p. 114). Insofar as there are not only the causes and sources of well-being that differ across cultures but also its nature², by articulating universal notions and definitions of well-being, philosophers, researchers or theoreticians of happiness are in fact superimposing their own particular conception of nature of well-being based on meanings and practices of their cultural background on other cultures. In other words, by advocating or trying to articulate universal notions and definitions of well-being, they are inescapably caught in a form ethnocentrism, which corresponds to a ‘process by which values and ways of seeing the world that are founded in one culture are used to comprehend and judge another’ (Barker 2004, p. 63).

Since quantitative survey measurements and comparisons of well-being need to presuppose such universal concepts and definitions of happiness, they are also susceptible to the charge of ethnocentrism. By placing ‘contemporary understandings of psychological and subjective well-being’ in a ‘cultural and historical context,’ Christopher (1999, p. 141) has put forward several convincing arguments to support ‘the hypothesis that, despite intentions to be value-neutral, subjective well-being is actually normative; its very design presupposes values and assumptions that are central to Western culture’ (Christopher 1999, p. 146). Even though Christopher mostly refers to the psychological SWB research, which was prevalent at the time of the writing of his article, we believe that his arguments are equally valid for all perspectives in empirical happiness research that advocate or assume universal notions of well-being³. According to Christopher (1999, p. 141), empirical survey happiness research (and, in our view, other theoretical and research perspectives in happiness studies also) problematically presupposes ‘ontological and liberal individualism as notions of the self and as normative prescriptions for the good or ideal person’. Ahmed (2007/2008, p. 10) is close to Christopher’s position, arguing that

² Empirical evidence for this argument can be found both in the work done within the cultural perspective in happiness studies (see for example Kitayama and Markus 2000; Lu and Gilmour 2004; Uchida et al. 2004; Pflug 2008; Oishi et al. 2013) and in the research of anthropology of well-being (see Mathews and Izquierdo 2009).

³ This includes the eudemonic approach to empirical happiness research (EWB) that examines well-being based on the “universalized” Aristotelian vision of well-being, which is clearly tied to the Western cultural context.

‘the science of happiness relies on a *very* specific model of subjectivity, where one knows how one feels, and where the distinction between good and bad feeling is secure, forming the basis of subjective as well as social well-being’. And so are Kitayama and Markus (2000, p. 153): ‘often as innocuous and well-intended as they are, various attempts to apply theories of happiness that are implicitly grounded in Western ideas of progress, liberalism, egalitarianism, and freedom to other cultural contexts may not reveal, but distort, lived experiences of the people in those cultures’.

Rather than uncritically relying on biased universal notions of well-being, Christopher argues (1999, p. 149), therapists, theoreticians and researchers of happiness ought to be conscious of the fact that ‘understandings of psychological well-being necessarily rely upon moral visions that are culturally embedded and frequently culture-specific’. As a consequence, ‘the idea of developing entirely culture-free measures, theories or interventions is seriously misguided’ (Christopher 1999, p. 149). If we (as researchers and theoreticians of happiness and well-being) ‘believe that we are discovering universal and ahistorical psychological truths rather than re-interpreting and extending our society’s or community’s moral visions,’ Christopher further warns (1999, p. 149), ‘then we run the risk of casting non-Western people, ethnic minorities, and women as inherently less psychologically healthy’.

The ‘anthropology of well-being,’ conceived with the publication of the first anthropological reader on happiness, and edited by Mathews and Izquierdo (2009, p. 8), is also ‘highly skeptical’ towards quantitative survey-based research of happiness, ‘seeing them as inevitably ethnocentric in their use of Western-derived survey instruments to compare a range of societies across the world’. In spite of the fact that these survey-based studies are becoming more sophisticated, anthropologists insist that universal notions and scales used by quantitative researchers ‘privilege some cultural conceptions over others’ (Mathews and Izquierdo 2009, p. 8). As a consequence, they believe that ‘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’ (Mathews and Izquierdo 2009, p. 9). Similar to the cultural perspective in happiness studies, anthropology adopts a cultural constructionist approach⁴: ‘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’ (Mathews and Izquierdo 2009, p. 5).

Anthropologists of well-being see the answer to the problem of ethnocentrism inherent in philosophical universal notions of well-being and empirical survey research in cultural relativism that has been one of the most important tenets of their discipline since the start of the twentieth century. Before we can explore what cultural relativism brings to the research of happiness, we first have to clarify the ‘problem with an unswerving cultural relativism’ in relation to well-being as raised

⁴ This similarity is quite obvious considering the fact that cultural psychology was actually born out of a strand of twentieth-century anthropology (see LeVine 2007).

by Diener and Suh (2000, p. 5). While ‘respecting many differences between countries,’ Diener and Suh (2000, p. 5) and Diener (2007) are reluctant about what they call an ‘all-out cultural relativism’ because according to them, it is ‘too accepting of terrible people and sick societies’. With the help of anthropology, we have to observe that Diener and Suh (2000) have apparently based their position on cultural relativism on an erroneous understanding of the concept. Claiming that the problem with cultural relativism is ‘that every outcome is as good as every other; a Hitler is judged to be as good as Francis of Assisi’ (Diener and Suh 2000, p. 5) points to an obvious confusion between the concepts of cultural relativism and moral relativism. According to Marcus and Fisher (1986, p. 32), such misuses of the concept emerge from the fact that cultural relativism ‘has all too often been portrayed as a doctrine rather than as a method and reflection on the process of interpretation itself’. While an extreme position of moral relativism, conceived as rejecting universal moral truths, could indeed lead to Diener and Suh’s radical claim on cultural relativism, for anthropologists the concept instead corresponds to a methodology that follows the guidelines that there is

no one best or most rational way to organize society; that different cultures had evolved different constellations of values and social mechanisms; that it is often more realistic to try to learn alternative ways of organizing societies by observing other cultures than by ivory-tower speculation about reforming society; that cultural values cannot be ethically judged in abstract philosophical terms, but must be evaluated in terms of their actual effects on social life (Marcus and Fischer 1986, p. 170).

Anthropologists, hence, persistently defend against ‘critics who charge that relativism asserts the equal validity of all value systems, thus making moral judgments impossible, and that in its insistence on fundamental respect for cultural differences among human societies, it has paralyzed all schemes of generalization, by which the progress of any science must proceed’ (Marcus and Fischer 1986, p. 32).

Criticism of Survey Happiness Research

According to the anthropologists of well-being, the cross-cultural comparison of survey data is not only ethnocentric, but also ‘leaves out too much to be fully credible’ (Mathews and Izquierdo 2009, p. 6). According to (Mathews and Izquierdo 2009, p. 6) this is because ‘surveys do not ask respondents to talk about their senses of well-being in their own words’. Rather, further argue (Mathews and Izquierdo 2009, p. 6) ‘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 ways⁵. In other words, surveys ‘reify what can be measured and ignore what cannot be measured’ (Mathews and Izquierdo 2009,

⁵ This is also confirmed by Wierzbicka’s (2004) cross-linguistic and cross-cultural research on happiness.

p. 8). According to anthropologists of well-being, the only way to adhere to the methodological premises of cultural relativism and to avoid the inherent incompleteness of survey research is to conduct ethnographic research in the cultures of interest, 'which can provide the social and cultural context without which well-being in a given society cannot be fully understood' (Mathews and Izquierdo 2009, p. 250):

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 language formulations of well-being and to reveal, through close ethnographic description, how these play out in people's daily lives, words, and worlds (Mathews and Izquierdo 2009, p. 9).

Following from this, Mathews and Izquierdo warn (2009, p. 6), we have to be extremely careful when comparing different cultures in terms of well-being: '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 socio-cultural context ethnographically portrayed' (Mathews and Izquierdo 2009, p. 6). In this sense, anthropologists of well-being consider their approach as an 'empirical antidote to the straitjackets of comparison adhered to by some other disciplines, such as economics and psychology, which more or less insist on a common standard of measurement for all societies' (Mathews and Izquierdo 2009, p. 248).

Even though the cultural perspective in happiness studies does not proclaim to be following cultural relativism,⁶ nor does it explicitly criticize survey methods on account of their ethnocentrism, it could be argued that it adheres to all the major methodological tenets of cultural relativism as understood by anthropologists of well-being:

A cultural psychological approach does not automatically assume that all behavior can be explained by the same set of constructs and measures, and enquires first whether a given construct is meaningful and how it is used in a given cultural context. In other words, a Western conception of SWB should not be superimposed on other cultures; instead, indigenous conceptions of SWB bred in particular cultural contexts should be unraveled and systematically mapped out (Lu and Gilmour 2004, p. 271).

The cultural perspective also agrees with the anthropology of well-being that 'statistical measures of well-being are not inherently flawed, but they are inherently incomplete' (Mathews and Izquierdo 2009, p. 250):

The literature on well-being has so far been based on large surveys. Although useful in revealing general descriptions, this methodology has inherent limitations. The cultural perspective presented here suggests that cultural meanings are often tacit—they are not recognized by the person who engages in them, and they therefore are unlikely to be revealed in any survey data. A variety of reasons underlie this problem of survey methodology. The

⁶ Perhaps the reason behind this is connected with the fact that they are trying to avoid the charge of moral relativism that could be based on the misunderstanding of their position on cultural relativism.

most important is that cultural meanings are embodied in patterns of cultural practices and conventions. Such practices and conventions are often tacit, normative, carrying little, if any, subjective significance. Yet, they are a significant contributor to subjective well-being. They provide the framework within which individuals, singly or collectively, seek to achieve cultural adaptation in order to attain a state of well-being. Research can benefit from dense descriptions of the lived world of the peoples under study, and then by bringing this cultural knowledge to bear on the theories and methods developed to test those theories (Kitayama and Markus 2000, p. 153).

While the anthropology of well-being is almost exclusively in favor of the ethnographic method, a cultural perspective is open to a variety of both quantitative as well as qualitative methods. To support their thesis and compare different cultural constructions of well-being, researchers from the cultural perspective use different quantitative (e.g. Kitayama and Markus 2001; Uchida et al. 2004) and qualitative research methods (e.g. Lu and Gilmour 2004; Pflug 2008). The latest research, however, seems to lean more towards the qualitative side, as it is more suitable for exploration of cultural meanings and practices that enter in the cultural construction of happiness. Lu and Gilmour (2004) and Pflug (2008), for example, have asked their research group to write essays on the theme ‘What is happiness?’ and, thus, tried to extrapolate the meanings respondents with a different cultural background attributed to happiness.

Happiness as Culturally and Historically Specific Experience

Above, we have discussed whether happiness and well-being can be considered as universal notions and experiences or if they are culturally specific. As shown, within the traditional empirical happiness research, the connection between culture and happiness has initially been explored as a purely methodological issue within cross-national comparative happiness measurements. Gradually, culture has become a relevant factor to be considered in order to explain and measure the differences in levels of happiness between nations and cultures. However, amongst happiness researchers and theoreticians, there are still notable differences in understanding the relationship between culture and happiness. Tiberius (2004) has showed that regardless of how they perceive the relation between culture and happiness, all researchers who are relying on survey-based cross-cultural comparisons of SWB are assuming a universal notion of well-being on which they can ground their research. While Tiberius (2004) and, according to her, most philosophers and researchers working in the area of well-being, try to support or assume universal notions of well-being, we, on the other hand, have questioned them. Namely, we have argued that Tiberius’s defense of universal notions of well-being is only valid for as long as differences between cultures are perceived solely in terms of causes and sources of well-being. Since the cultural perspective in happiness studies and anthropology of well-being have discovered more fundamental differences between



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