Against Well-Being: a critical analysis of the approximation between happiness and well-being promoted by Positive Psychology

Luciano Espósito Sewaybricker, Gustavo Martineli Massola

Abstract

More than two decades after his seminal paper Subjective Well-Being, Ed Diener wrote that he substituted happiness for well-being to obtain scientific credibility. Are the arguments echoed in Positive Psychology rigorous enough to justify this substitution? We focused on the historical examination of the word happiness, covering the lexical universe of ancient Greek, Latin, and English, seeking to identify the connections between them. We found that those changes are sustained by a fragile appreciation of the semantic depth of happiness. Although it favors quantification, the current understanding of well-being obliterates the plurality of the debate about happiness and the recognition of other ideals of life. Thus, we conclude that well-being and happiness are semantically close, but conceptually, metaphysically, and empirically distinct, deserving particular psychological investigation.

Keywords: happiness, well-being, subjective well-being, Positive Psychology, etymology

The concept of well-being has been of growing importance in psychology research since the 1980s (Diener, 1984; Ryff, 1989), having become central to the newly founded Positive Psychology (Seligman, 2011, p.13). Researcher Ed Diener became a fundamental character in its development, having written the article that came to be considered the inaugural landmark of the concept in psychology, 'Subjective Well-Being', in 1984.

One of the main elements proposed by Diener (1984), that would be echoed in the psychology of his time, was that well-being would be a scientific version of happiness, a word of great importance for people in general, but with different definitions throughout history. Diener referred to this characteristic of happiness as being too elusive to support scientific investigation (Diener, 1984, p.543).

For Diener (1984; 2009), two main arguments contributed to that elusiveness of happiness: first, the history of happiness in philosophy would be especially erratic and without consensus; second, there is a significant difference between the etymological root of the word, its common sense use in the United States, and important definitions on the subject, especially that of Aristotle (Diener, 1984, p.542-544; Raibley, 2012, p.1108). Thus, while the plural meanings of happiness would make a rigorous investigation impossible, well-being, taken as a semantically close object, would have the potential to reach the desired scientific rigor while stimulating an equivalent interest on the part of people. Drawing on this perception, Diener (1984) proposed his particular definition of well-being.

However, although there are arguments in favor of taking well-being as a central concept the fragility of the explanation that Diener later offered about his choice is significant: 'In part to gain credibility within psychological science, researchers began using the term "well-being" rather than "happiness" because it sounded more scientific' (Disabato, Goodman and Kashdan, 2019,

p.5) Or, as Lyubomirsky (2008, p.316) reported: 'Ed Diener (…) told me once that he coined the term subjective well-being because he didn't think he would be promoted with tenure if his research were perceived as focusing on something so fuzzy and soft as "happiness"'. In other words, the choice would be made less by the previous arguments and more by the impact of the words; it would not deal with a substitution of the object itself, but of the name.

This apparent lack of rigor in choosing to replace happiness is perhaps evident in the profusion of adjectives applied to well-being, such as subjective (Diener, 1984), psychological (Ryff, 1989), eudaimonic and hedonic (Ryan and Deci, 2001). Or even in the plethora of ways to evaluate that object. Linton, Dieppe and Medina-Lara (2016) identified 99 tools evaluating 196 distinct dimensions of well-being. That is, the replacement of happiness by well-being does not seem to have found the desired scientificity.

Observing this context, we ask: how rigorous is the replacement of the word happiness by well-being in psychology research? Are the arguments organized by Diener (1984) and echoed in Positive Psychology rigorous and sufficient to justify this substitution? At what point in its history did the word happiness come close to well-being in order to make such a replacement seem coherent?

Method

As Bakhtin (Volosinov, 1986, p.19) wrote: '[the] word is able to register the most intimate, most ephemeral transitory phases of social change (...) [because] the word constitutes the medium in which are produced slow quantitative accumulations of change that have not had time to transform into new theories yet.' Given that the approximation between happiness and well-being can be

investigated in many ways, we focus on examining the history of the word happiness. This will help us understand what these quantitative accumulations would be. Also, we understand that the use of this word in Positive Psychology is part of the history of happiness and can therefore be examined in the light of this historical path.

We will cover a time horizon similar to that performed in Diener (1984), going from the Aristotelian concept of eudaimonia to the scientific concept of well-being. But, unlike Diener (1984), we will consider the various linguistic transformations and the fact that new translations are not always faithful to the original words. Thus, we will go through the lexical universe of ancient Greek (*eudaimonia/makarios*), Roman Latin (*felicitas/beatitudo*) and English (happiness/well-being), seeking to identify the connections between them. To do this, we consulted classic works in their original language and historical review works on happiness (McMahon, 2004; McMahon, 2006; de Heer, 1969; Curtis, 2002; Buffon, 2004; Wierzbicka, 2004).

It is important to point out that the current article is methodologically distinct from other important work critical to Positive Psychology, as Ahmed's (2010), Binkley's (2014), and Brown and Rohrer's (2020). The criticisms made previously don't include the linguistic diversity around the happiness debate and in the interchangeable use of happiness and well-being. In Ahmed (2010), the focus was on the performativity of the idea of happiness, without considering in depth the different ways one can refer to this idea. For Binkley (2014), something similar occurred as they analyzed the relationship between the general understanding of happiness, the neoliberal life and consumerism. On the other hand, Brown and Rohrer (2020) were more attentive to methodologically problems and lack of transparency in Positive Psychology's research, without dwelling on the concept of happiness.

Therefore, the goal of the current research is to offer a new analytical perspective that can complement the already numerous critics to mainstream happiness research.

Eudaimon and *Makar*

Aristotle is mentioned repeatedly in works that deal with happiness, his role as a central reference being due to his systematization of the idea in 'Nicomachean Ethics' (Aristotle, 1934). Unlike other thinkers of his period, Aristotle synthesized a complex semantic field about the ideal life (including words like *olbios*, *makarios* and *eftychía*) around the noun *eudaimonia* and the adjective *eudaimon* (de Heer, 1969). Early in the book, Aristotle (1934, 1095a14-25) wrote: 'As far as the name goes, we may almost say that the great majority of mankind are agreed about this; for both the multitude and persons of refinement speak of it as Happiness [*eudaimonia*] (…).'

It is to this concept, *eudaimonia*, that contemporary research refers when dealing with happiness for Aristotle. And, beyond what Aristotle presents about *eudaimonia*, it is relevant to understand the root of this word: *eudaimon* is the junction of the adverbial suffix *eu* (which means 'something good, positive, prosperous') and the stem *daimon* (which means 'demon'). That is, *eudaimon* literally means 'good demon'. Importantly, demons in ancient Greek thought were considerably different from demons in Christian thought (Abbagnano, 1962, p.279). The demon was a neutral being and was not part of any religious cult, having taken three main meanings throughout ancient Greek literature and philosophy (Burkert, 1977, p.353): (1) *daimon* could refer to an intermediary being between the gods and human beings, responsible for making the prayers of the latter and the commandments of the former pass through; (2) further, as it appears in Homer, *daimon* could be used to refer to an unspeakable power, indicating that a person had a piece of the divine in him or her; (3) or else, *daimon* could be used as a reference to

someone's inner voice – Plato and Xenophon wrote about the good 'demon' of Socrates that made him brilliant (Fernandes and Lima, 2019). Generally speaking, being said to have a good demon was desirable; it implied possessing great power, being on track in life, and probably being guided by the gods (Chantraine, 1968). Burnet (Aristotle, 1900, p.1) adds that, due to its enigmatic origin, having a good demon (instead of an evil demon) was a sign of luck.

However, even after Aristotle's systematization, the use of *eudaimon* and *eudaimonia* did not remain stable. Interestingly, as ancient Greek civilization began to decline, philosophers like Epicurus began to use another noun to refer to the ideal life: *makarios*. *Makarios* (or its adjective, *makar*) was generally used to refer to a good life, but with a more exalted, emotional tone, with a more intense divine participation than in the case of *eudaimon* (McMahon, 2006, p.3, p.68; de Heer, 1969, p.55).

The new context of social chaos (Stock, 1908) strongly influenced the choice for the new word to refer to *happiness*. Epicurus wanted to propose a philosophy that would help people to live the ideal life, which, for him, consisted of a life immune to the oscillations of the world at war and its various misfortunes. This ideal life was, for Epicurus, similar to the life of the gods, as in part of the 'Letter to Menoeceus': 'So practice these and similar things day and night, by yourself and with a like-minded friend, and you will never be disturbed whether waking or sleeping, and you will live as a god among men' (Epicurus, 2011, excerpt 135).

Using the word *makarios* instead of *eudaimonia* served both as a reference to a life with characteristics shared with the gods, and as a provocation, as a sign that the divine secret had been unlocked. But it is not just with Epicurus that the axis of the discussion about *happiness* would change the word. This change would also occur with the Latin of Ancient Rome involving both philosophers and religious men and women. If in Ancient Greece it was *eudaimonia, olbios,*

makarios and *eftychía* that populated the semantic field of happiness, in Ancient Rome the more

relevant words were two: *felicitas* and *beatitudo*.

Felicitas **and** *Beatitudo*

Originally, the adjective *felix* and the noun *felicitas* were directly related to fertility (McMahon,

2006, p.67). Fertility conceived in a broad way, as fertility of the body and the land: abundant

crops, plenty of food or drink, a large and healthy family. In an agrarian society, these were

important elements for a good life. They were signs that the goddess Fortuna had blessed those

lands   and   those   people.

  Felix and *felicitas*, therefore, pointed to a meaningful, well-lived life, but were words little

explored by Roman philosophers. This was partly because their mundane character was associated

with the pursuit of unbridled pleasures in urban centers. Roman cultural practices indicated a world

of excesses of the senses, in the politics of bread and circuses, battles in the coliseum, chariot races

and in the practice of vomitories (McMahon, 2006, p. 66). The Stoic philosopher and poet Horace

(1892, book III.16, p.85-86) made clear the problem of indulging in these excesses of *felix*: 'As

riches grow, care follows: men repine / And thirst for more.' This did not mean that philosophers

found *felix* a negative word, but the best possible life, the one that

referred to what the Greek philosophers proposed, should not be summarized by this word, but by

another: *beatitudo*.

  The adjective *beatus* and the noun *beatitudo* derive from the Latin verb *beo* which means

'to complete', 'to satisfy', 'to fill', in the sense that nothing is missing and everything is in its

perfect place (Beraldi, 2010, p.13). *Beatitudo* will indicate, therefore, the full life, very different

from what the philosophers thought about *felicitas*, which would be a life only superficially satisfied.

Cicero and Seneca are two important Roman Stoic philosophers who wrote substantially on *beatitudo*. Here is an excerpt from Cicero (1914, p.177-179, chapter II, excerpts 86 and 87) about the excellence of blessed life: '(…) if there is such a thing as happiness [*beatum*], it is bound to be attainable in its entirety by the Wise Man. (…) For when happiness [*beata vita*] has once been achieved, it is as permanent as Wisdom itself (…).' Or even an excerpt in which Cicero (1877, p.195, book V, excerpt 86) points out that *felicitas* would be secondary compared to a blessed life: 'so life may be properly called happy [*felicitas*], not from its being entirely made up of good things [*beata*], but because it abounds with these to a great and considerable degree.' Seneca (1699) similarly wrote extensively on *beatitudo*, having even named one of his books '*De vita beata*'.

It is important to consider that, for the Roman philosophers, the idea of a blessed life did not yet have the religious meaning that it currently has. This meaning only developed with the rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire, especially with the dissemination of versions of the New Testament in Latin, which also played a central role in the connection between the Greek words *eudaimonia* and *makarios* with the philosophical-theological tradition in Latin.

The New Testament, written in Koine (which was a popular form of ancient Greek), spread throughout ancient Rome between 50 and 90 AD. In it, the word *makarios* was recurrently used to refer to the ideal life in God's eyes. In the famous Sermon on the Mount, in the 5th chapter of Matthew (Mt.5.1-12): 'Blessed [*makarios*] are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. / Blessed [*makarios*] are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.' This choice to portray the ideal life by *makarios* and not *eudaimonia* had a fundamental reason.

If in the Old Testament God was responsible for all the good and bad things that happened, in the New Testament God was responsible only for the good things. Bad things were the result of actions of demons. These recent New Testament characters, demons, were referred to in Koine as *daimonion*, a diminutive of *daimon*, as in the word *eudaimonia*: 'The sacrifices of the Gentiles are offered to demons [*daimoniis*] and not to God, and I do not want you to have part with demons [*daimoniorum*]' (I Co.10.20). And, coherently, the Latin versions of the New Testament would end up translating *makarios* as *beatitudo* (McMahon, 2004, p.9; Fernandes and Lima, 2019), after all, the ideal life referred to in the New Testament was the complete life (of the kingdom of God) and not the earthly life of sensory excesses.

It is possible to conclude that the break with the word *eudaimonia*, used to refer to the ideal life, happened in two ways: the philosophical way, with Epicurus' protest that the divine life could be lived by human beings; and through religion, with the emergence of the figure of the Christian devil. And in this rupture, the words *eudaimonia* and *felicitas* would be left aside, while *makarios* and *beatitudo* would be used by philosophers, poets and religious people to refer to the best possible life. Later in history, in the 4th century, Saint Augustine would incorporate the philosophical use of *beatitudo* to the religious one, systematizing it. He would have such influence that the meaning he gave to *beatitudo* and *beatus* would be dominant during almost the entire Middle Ages, marking these words with the meaning they still have today.

The return of *felicitas* in the Early Middle Ages

After the turn of the first millennium, some scholars began to silently question the prohibitions and limits imposed by religious leaders as to what could and could not be read and taught in

European universities (Buffon, 2004, p.451-3). As a result, hitherto prohibited works, such as those by Aristotle, began to receive gradual translations and comments (McMahon, 2006, p.126). Especially relevant to the story of the word *happiness* are the first Latin translations of Aristotle's 'Nicomachean Ethics' ('*Ethica Noua'* and '*Ethica Vetus'*) between 1150 and 1250 AD. In them, the central word to the debate, e*udaimonia*, was translated as *felicitas* (Buffon, 2004, p.455), differing from the then dominant *beatitudo*.

Buffon (2004, p.457) explains that this change in vocabulary, bringing back *felicitas*, served to indicate a greater independence of human beings in relation to the divine and was a good reflection of the cultural change Europe was going through (Robertson, 2021). If Epicurus seemed to protest when using the word *makarios*, the choice of *felix* and *felicitas* also represented a protest in favor of what had been 'forbidden' by religious thought: the relationship with the body and with what could be enjoyed in life. Not that the Renaissance *felicitas* was limited to that, but it was an important point of opposition to *beatitudo*.

Some thinkers close to the Church, such as St. Thomas Aquinas, would try to reconcile the idea of Aristotelian *eudaimonia* (now *felicitas*) with religious thought. But despite the effort, social changes took their course. This is clear in books that proposed earthly ideal worlds, such 'Utopia', by Thomas Morus (1518) and in the profusion of books that had *felicitas* in the title, such as '*De Viri felicitate*', '*De vitae felicitate*'. *Felicitas* also spread as a community ideal (Muratori, 1749) and as the subject of works of art, such as those by Italians Orazio Gentileschi, '*Felicità pubblica che trionfa sui pericoli*', and Agnolo Bronzino, '*Allegoria della Felicità*' (McMahon, 2006, p.155-158).

Happiness **and** *bonheur*

It is curious to note how the idea of luck permeates many of the words that are part of the history of happiness. Aristotle (1934, 1099a31–1099b5), for example, was keen to point out that without luck (*olbios* and *eftychía*), *eudaimonia* would be impossible or very difficult to achieve; while the fertility of *felicitas* was a kind of consequence of someone's luck (McMahon, 2006). And even with the transformations through which the word *felicitas* rose to prominence in 12th century Europe, luck remained an important part of ideal life.

This relationship between happiness and luck was natural. First, since there was no consensus on what *felicitas* was, feeling it, finding it, or feeling confident enough to talk about it was largely also a result of luck. In addition, even though the quality of life had been increasing with technological development, living was far from reaching the current health and longevity rates. Up to 1600, 11.3% of women died from problems during pregnancy and almost 20% of children died within the first year of life; in 1745, the life expectancy of a 21-year-old man did not exceed 50 years (Lancaster, 1990, p.8-9). In other words, reaching adulthood and wondering about happiness was already a sign of luck.

In Renaissance Europe, therefore, it did not seem strange that the sense of luck continued to be intertwined with *felicitas* and *felix*, even though people's autonomy and power were important parts of the meaning of these words. In other words, it can be said that luck was no longer related to divine will (as in *beatitudo* or *makarios*) and had come to be understood in an earthly way, a chance intrinsic to life. It is against this background of luck that different European languages developed and ended up incorporating their own versions of *felicitas*.

In the case of happiness, the reference word is *hap*, which has its roots in Old Norse, a language spoken in Scandinavia that spread throughout northern Europe between the 7th and 15th

centuries. There is a record of the word *hap* being used as chance, luck, coincidence, as early as 1200 (OED Online, 2021). Suffixes and meanings have been added to this radical until it got close to the contemporary use of happiness. In 1500 the noun happiness was already used to refer to the ideal life. In addition to happiness, the word felicity, a direct translation from Latin, also became common after 1500, being used as a synonym for happiness by Jeremy Bentham (1823), for example. Happiness and felicity soon became central to reflection on the ideal life in the English language: Aristotle's translations, such as the one by John Gillies (Aristotle, 1797), used both words to replace *eudaimonia*; Protestant religious leaders used the word to address the ideal life in God's eyes, as did Richard Holdsworth (1642, p.5-6): 1*Happinesse* is the language of all We must look through all things upon *happinesse* (...) and through *happinesse* upon all things.1 John Locke (1689, p.181) also used the word *happiness* several times, as in: 'If it be farther asked, what it is moves desire? I answer, Happiness, and that alone.'

It is noteworthy that a very similar vocabulary development occurred in French. In this language, the word understood as luck around 1200, *heur*, would be the root for the translation of the Aristotelian *eudaimonia* (Centre National de Ressources Textuelles et Lexicales, 2021). Until 1500, words derived from *heur* (the adjective *heureux* and the noun *bonheur*, which literally means 'good luck'), became the French references for the ideal life. *Bonheur* also gained a synonym derived directly from Latin: *felicité*. Books were published dealing specifically with *bonheur*, as in Fleury Bourriquant's '*Exhortation aux Parisiens*' (1614) in which he writes *'pour le bonheur de sa Majesté'* or in Émilie du Chatelet's 1779 '*Discours sur le Bonheur*' (1910). *Bonheur* would even become the horizon for the French Revolution.

In summary, it can be said that there was an important unification of the semantic field related to the ideal life in the period between the 12th and 17th centuries. Until then, the dominant

word, *beatitudo*, was used mostly in a religious sense, excluding alternative interpretations. On the other hand, the rescue of *felicitas* as a translation of the Aristotelian *eudaimonia* broke the strictly religious tradition and unified a long historical-philosophical journey from the classical Greeks, including its religious bias. *Felicitas* would be a comprehensive reference to the inquiry about the ideal life, serving as a basis for languages in formation and their use for translations of early philosophers' work.

The Declaration of Independence and the French Revolution

The poet Claude Adrien Helvétius (1909, p.264-5), in 1740, stated in the poem '*Le Bonheur*' that the 18th century was the century of *bonheur*. And that was actually a good definition. As *happiness* and *bonheur* became central to the ideal of life, they were naturally themes that gained more and more prominence with Enlightenment thinkers (McMahon, 2006, p.209; Robertson, 2021). And it is not hard to find the emphasis on that word throughout that period. Baron d'Holbach (1795, p.9), in 1772, synthesized the relationship between 'lights' and happiness: 'Men are unhappy, only because they are ignorant (...)'. While William Wordsworth (1953, p.197) indicated his enthusiasm for the imminence of happiness in the poem 'The Prelude': 'Not in Utopia, -subterranean fields,-/ Or some secreted island, Heaven knows where!/ But in the very world, which is the world/ Of all of us, - the place where, in the end,/ We find our happiness, or not at all!'

However, Enlightenment enthusiasm was not enough to truly unveil happiness. Even using the best equipment of the time, Jeremy Bentham (Davies, 2016, p.25-26) was not able to perform his *felicific calculus*, which would be the sum of the happiness of the different members of society (Bentham, 1823, p.2). At the end of his life, Bentham (quoted in Dinwiddy, 2004, p.49) wrote: ''Tis is vain… to talk of adding quantities which after the addition will continue distinct as they

were before. One man's happiness will never be another man's happiness: a gain to one man is no gain to another (…).'

In spite of the failure of the illuminist-utilitarian plan to delimit and produce happiness two important ideas of this movement took deep root in European and American society: the idea that, if happiness was people's purpose, it should be the logical purpose of governments; and the idea that happiness was lived individually. Even at the end of the 18th century, this influence would be evident in the French Constitution and, above all, in the Declaration of Independence of the United States.

In the case of the American Declaration of Independence (1776), the mention of happiness is classic: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their creator with unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.' In the case of the French Revolution, the mention of happiness is a little more subtle. It appears in the preamble of the declaration that was written in 1789, which reads: *'au bonheur de tous'* ('for the happiness of all'); and in the preamble of the constitution formulated in 1793, *'Le but de la société est le bonheur commun'* ('The purpose of society is common happiness', McMahon, 2006, p.261)

If *happiness* as the purpose of a government was evident in both documents, its strictly individual character was particular to the Declaration of Independence. Until that moment in history, happiness was still understood on a blurred border with the collective. Marie Joseph Lequinio (1793, p.1, emphasis added), an important character in the French Revolution, wrote: '(…) *l'homme vertueux, l'homme qui rend fon **bonheur** inhérent à celui des autres, & qui ne fait être **heureux** que de la **félicité publique**'* ('the virtuous man, the man who makes his happiness inherent in the happiness of others, and who is only happy as consequence of public happiness').

But in the Declaration of Independence happiness was treated much closer to Bentham's utilitarianism, that is, as a strictly individual happiness and not as a 'public' one. Treating it as an individual's right represented an important change in the way people talked about happiness. First, as an individual right, it was reinforced that its experience and perception were specific to the individual person. Second, when dealing with the right to pursue it (pursuit), the responsibility for happiness was placed on each individual. Of course, the government could be held responsible for not favoring that happiness, but it was assumed that the achievement was proper to the private field.

The prolongation of happiness in the 19th and 20th century

Despite the continued interest in happiness and its insertion in the political world, the answer to the question 'what is happiness?' still uncertain. Inserting it in the Constitution or creating a Declaration in which it was central did not eliminate the historic debate around the word happiness. This recurrent failure to define and promote it ended up leading scholars and philosophers to distance themselves from the theme (Comte-Sponville, 1997; McMahon, 2006) or to adopt a pessimistic tone, as Kant (2002, p.11) wrote: 'In fact we also find that the more a cultivated reason gives itself over to the aim of enjoying life and happiness, the further the human being falls short of true contentment'.

Even far from philosophical production, happiness still remained as a reference to the ideal life and, therefore, naturally present in current vocabulary. Happiness was still something to be 'chased'. Wierzbicka (2004) tells that, when migrating from the philosophical field to the political and everyday field, happiness had its meaning gradually transformed, especially in the United

States. Up to the 1800s, happy and happiness were used to refer to something rare, that only a few could achieve: they were references to an ideal. Few would experience happiness and few would feel truly happy. But, following the Declaration of Independence, in which the perception of happiness was individual, the adjective happy started to be used much more recurrently, referring to a sensation that could be perceived in different degrees. Calling oneself happy would not depend on anyone else. McMahon (2004) summarizes this important transformation of the idea of happiness as the passage from the 'happiness of virtue' to the 'virtue of happiness': feeling happy became a good in itself.

It is not strange, therefore, that phrases such as 'I'm happy with the present arrangements' are common nowadays. Wierzbicka (2004, p.38) also points out that, although this is no longer particular to the United States, it is more intense in that country: '(…) happy is not only uttered much more frequently than sad (roughly 3:1) and joyful (roughly 36:1), but also much more frequently than, for example, *heureux* is in comparable French listings (roughly 5:1).' If the Declaration of Independence can be understood as an important trigger for this meaning of happiness, events in the first half of the 20th century would be its catalysts.

First, given the political interest in *happiness*, large-scale surveys such as those by Gallup (Newport, 2010), Centers and Cantril (1946) and Watson (1930) started to investigate the degree to which people perceived themselves to be happy. In other words, they started to collect answers to questions like 'from zero to ten, how happy are you?'. In addition to highlighting the great interest in happiness, this initiative also strengthened the quantifiable character of happiness for people, which would have been unthinkable in other times (Wierzbicka, 2004). Second, the widespread interest in happiness led advertisers to make this theme central to their campaigns (Curtis, 2002). The then American president Herbert Hoover, in 1928, in a meeting with executives

of advertising agencies, stated: 'You have taken over the job of creating desire and have transformed people into constantly moving happiness machines. Machines, which have become the key to economic progress.' (Curtis, 2002). In addition to being gradable, happiness also became achievable through very simple activities, such as consumption, with advertising playing the 'pedagogical' role, as stated by the president of the advertising agency JWT, Stanley Resor: 'Advertising is educational work, mass education' (Davies, 2016, p.93).

Although it has not become as commonplace as the adjective happy, the noun happiness has also had its meaning transformed. This can be seen in the changes that the word happiness has undergone in versions of the Webster dictionary since 1850 (Oishi *et al*, 2013). In them, happiness was increasingly referred to in sensory terms. If in older versions of the dictionary the definitions included sensations, but also luck and virtues, from 1961 onward the reference to luck started to be pointed out as archaic and sensation became central: '(a) a state of well-being characterized by relative permanence, by dominantly agreeable emotion ranging in value from mere contentment to deep and intense joy in living, and by a natural desire for its continuation; (b) a pleasurable or enjoyable experience.' (Oishi *et al.*, 2013, p.11)

Another important sign of the change in the meaning of happiness can be seen in the examination of the translation of *eudaimonia* as happiness. If, in 1900, editor John Burnet wrote on the first page of his 'The Ethics of Aristotle': 'We need not hesitate to translate the word "eudaimonia" by the English "happiness" (…)' (Aristotle, 1900, p.1), this confidence would no longer be verifiable throughout the 20th century. The idea that the current use of happiness had moved away from its Aristotelian meaning gained momentum.

In 1934, translator and editor H. Rackham (Aristotle, 1934, 6th footnote) described his discomfort in a note to the first translation of *eudaimonia*, in which, despite the fact that the choice

for *happiness* seemed inevitable: 'would perhaps be more accurately rendered by "Well-being" or "Prosperity"; and it will be found that the writer does not interpret it as a state of feeling but as a kind of activity.' Rackham's perception would eventually be strengthened by other scholars such as Dybikowski (1981, p.185):

> The differences between the two notions, it is now commonly supposed, are too many and too deep to think that happiness and eudaimonia are very closely related; and consequently "happiness", the long-established conventional translation, will seriously mislead us in understanding the nature of Aristotelian eudaimonia.

It cannot be denied that the current use of happiness (as an individual right based on sensation) is considerably different from the Aristotelian concept of eudaimonia, even though the history of both words is connected, as indicated here. In any case, the questioning of happiness raised by Aristotle's translators ended up generating an apparently irreconcilable tension between academic rigor and common sense; between the history of the word and its current use. Happiness ambiguously represented the ideal life and, at the same time, banal aspects of everyday life.

Happiness and well-being

It was in view of this tension and the perception that happiness remained extremely relevant for people that researchers such as Ed Diener approached this theme in the 1980s. There was a perception, particularly in the United States, that the utilitarian failure had been surpassed and complex themes such as happiness could be scientifically studied (Skinner, 1972, p.196). And there were several reasons for this enthusiasm: statistical analyzes already had computers capable of performing multidimensional calculations (Anderson, 1958); large-scale research on happiness

accumulated results and allowed for important correlations (Wilson, 1967); and devices such as the electroencephalogram allowed the assessment of sensations, avoiding linguistic complexity (Davies, 2016, p.32).

In any case, Diener (1984) seemed to understand that the solution to the tension was not only instrumental but also ontological. After all, happiness remained complex and ambiguous as an object. As a solution, then, the author performed what we will metaphorically call 'semantic surgery', in which well-being played a fundamental role.

In order to do his research, Diener (1984, p.543) needed an object that was both well delimited and socially relevant, and happiness clearly met only the relevance criterion. With that, instead of joining the ancient attempt to delimit happiness, Diener preferred to invest in another word, well-being. Firstly, well-being appeared to be quite malleable and, consequently, definable: it was little used in the common sense (Warr, 2007, p.3-4) and its central meaning (existing or being well) was broad enough to be associated with concrete themes, like physical health, and abstract ones, like the relationship with God. Second, well-being and happiness were semantically close, as both dealt with desirable aspects of life. It was this proximity that enabled Diener (1984) to 'surgically' transport the relevance of happiness to well-being.

But how to transfer the relevance from one to the other without well-being ending up contaminated by the complexity of happiness? To this end, two main strategies were (and continue to be) used: (1) the importance of happiness is carried over to well-being whenever these words are used as synonyms, or when it is stated that the second is the scientific version of the first (Lyubomirsky, 2008, p.32); (2) on the other hand, the complexity of happiness is kept away from well-being whenever a clear boundary is drawn between them (Seligman, 2011). It is not uncommon for both strategies to be used in the same work, as Diener (1984) did.

It is noteworthy that Diener (1984, p.543-544) formalized a reorganization of the history of happiness in the way he presented both words. At first, Diener, in agreement with some contemporary translators, excluded *eudaimonia* from the field of debate on happiness; in a second moment, Diener arbitrarily changed the theme addressed by Bentham from happiness/felicity to well-being. With this, Diener (1984) divided the history of happiness into two parts: an erratic and confused first part, called the history of happiness; and a second part, linear and unequivocal, selectively grouping elements that reinforced his arguments, addressed as a history of well-being. Diener's 'semantic surgery' was so successful that criticism from researchers such as Ryff (1989) and Ryan and Deci (2001) did not touch the word used or its foundations, but only superficial aspects of the theory. Diener (2009, p.4) wrote in a celebratory tone that his 1984 article had become a 'classic' and that he had been responsible for popularizing the field of study of the subject among psychologists.

What could justify the replacement of *happiness* by *well-being*?

Diener's (1984) proposal of well-being found resonance in the *zeitgeist* of psychology in the United States. Limiting happiness to what could be measured was consistent with the country's recent historical-cultural trajectory: the definition of happiness in the Webster dictionary, the text of the Declaration of Independence, survey questions, advertising practices and recent recommendations from Aristotle's translators supported this change. The justification, therefore, for substituting well-being for happiness can be seen as an obvious extension in the long and complex historical path of happiness. If feeling good had become the most important part of the meaning of happiness, why not limit one's scientific investigation to feeling itself? Furthermore, if the history of

happiness encompasses a wide range of words, such as those explored here, could well-being not be understood as a new word to be added to the most recent tip of this story?

However, the project of substituting happiness for well-being has some weaknesses that deserve to be examined. First of all, this substitution considers the meaning of a word in a superficial way. Diener (1984), and those who argue against the classical translation of *eudaimonia,* consider happiness based only on synchronic analysis (its punctual meaning in history), like the one present in the Webster dictionary and commonplace contemporary usage (Saussure, 1959). But this analysis is limited. As proposed by Sewaybricker (2017), mentions of happiness would refer to the best way to live, regardless of whether these mentions deal more specifically with pleasures, virtues, reason or the divine. That is, when using the word happiness meaning 'pleasant sensations' there would be an indication of something beyond the pleasurable sensation; it would also indicate that pleasurable sensations are central to what is understood to be the best way to live. Considering that the meaning of happiness is not restricted to the explicit and punctual allows us to understand that the contemporary 'happiness' of the United States is a product of cultural change that has taken place over almost two centuries. A process in which the idea of the 'best way to live' turned into something individual, graduated and easily understandable (Sewaybricker, 2017).

Second, the justification for substituting happiness for well-being is fragile as it does not identify a paradox that is produced when both words come together. Such a paradox even makes the rigorous investigation of well-being unfeasible. We explain: for the investigation of well-being to prosper as desired, the object must be especially simple (Diener, 1984, p.543). On the other hand, the importance that well-being borrows from happiness is not the result of superficiality, but precisely of its complexity in dealing with the 'best way to live'. Well-being needs to be

synonymous with happiness to motivate its research and also distinct from it in order to be researched as desired.

How rigorous is to replace *Happiness* with *Well-being*?

Discussing the rigor of word substitution implies contrasting arguments for and against it. But it is worth emphasizing that substitution is not subordinated to this rigorous analysis, since substitution can happen in spite of it. In the case of this work, we deal with a substitution (from happiness to well-being) that already happens widely and is, as Bakhtin (Volosinov, 2006) wrote, evidence of cultural transformations.

We were able to identify six main arguments in favor of replacing happiness with well-being: (1) the etymological root of happiness, related to luck, is very far from the scientific interest in the word. (2) Happy and happiness are used erratically in common sense and, in most cases, they distance themselves from the philosophical tradition of the word. (3) The history of happiness, considerably plural, makes it difficult to attribute a scientific status to the word. (4) There is an accumulation of academics questioning the classic translation of *eudaimonia* as happiness, even suggesting that well-being would be a better translation. (5) Definitions of happiness, as in the Webster dictionary, started to emphasize the dimension of feeling good, already very close to what can be understood as the 'being' well of well-being. (6) It is the individual's particular universe that would allow a rigorous quantitative assessment.

On the other hand, the history of happiness covered in this work allows us to elaborate counter-arguments, also organized in six points. (1) When talking about common sense or meaning in the dictionary, happiness is reduced to synchronic analysis, disregarding a large part of its

history and the linguistic connection that exists between different times and civilizations. (2) In turn, reducing happiness to the literalness of its etymological root implies ignoring that this 'luck' had a much deeper meaning at its time. (3) If the punctual analysis of the word is combined with its historical analysis, it will be possible to perceive the semantic depth of happiness (also referring to the 'best way to live'), even justifying the classic translation as *eudaimonia*. (4) It can be said that the individual's perception is part of the semantic field of happiness, but it cannot be said that happiness is reducible to perception. (5) The substitution proposed by Diener (1984) considers well-being as a *tabula rasa*: its common sense and its academic tradition are ignored. (6) A brief reflection on the history of well-being (as welfare) can point out an important distinction between the two words: if happiness is about the best life, well-being is about the good life.

This last point deserves to be explored. Although semantically close, there is a substantial difference between referring to the best life or the good life. To reflect on what is best, it is necessary to compare and rank variables, in addition to considering their relational and circumstantial effects. To reflect on the good life, an isolated analysis of variables and an understanding of its general quality are enough. For example, while optimism is generally perceived as good and part of a good life, a 'best life' analysis would require understanding specific relationships and contexts. After all, in certain circumstances, optimism can make someone passive in the face of injustice (Lomas and Ivtzan, 2016).

Final considerations

It is not by chance that Ahmed (2010) wrote about performativity of happiness. The general interest in the subject makes it especially influential on people's behavior. And one way by which one can

interfere in happiness - in the way people talk about it, recognize it, and live it - is by forging its history. We tried to show here that the recent approximation between happiness and well-being is connected as both cause and consequence with an important change in the meaning of happiness.

Two main problems arise from substituting happiness for well-being. The first is the distortion of the rich history of happiness. As exemplified in Diener (1984), this would be a requirement to achieve a rigorously measurable object. As a result, the history of happiness would become a history of disconnected ideas, guided by fragile common sense. Meanwhile, the new history of happiness as well-being would become a one-dimensional history of continuous confirmation of this scientific object (Diener, 1984). The second problem concerns the confusion between different objects: the 'best life' and the 'good life'. As they are not differentiated in psychological research, reflection on the 'best life' can be restricted to the simple accumulation of variables perceived as 'good' in general. This idea of accumulation is much in line with Binkley's (2014) argument of happiness as an enterprise: in the neoliberal life, it has become a resource that can be obtained, accumulated, and negotiated.

In line with the aspects presented here, we defend that both words, happiness and well-being should be treated as distinct objects in psychology. After all, distorting an object of investigation to adjust it to methodological desire seems lax, as Brown and Rohrer (2020) and Friedman and Brown (2018) have also noted. Happiness, with its complex history and ontology, may well constitute a scientific tradition alien to this simplification, making use, for example, of approaches and methods that are already traditional in social psychology (Willig and Rogers, 2017).

Despite the criticisms made here, well-being, in the way it has been treated, is an object that is indeed relevant. Relevance, however, that should not, or need not, be 'taken' from

happiness. The sociological, economic and political tradition of welfare, of promoting the good life (often in the form of what government should provide for a decent life) (Nadasen, Mittelstadt and Chappell, 2009) is relevant in its own right. It even has important points of dialogue with the history of *happiness*, such as its development in the 1800s in the work of utilitarians.

There is opportunity, as Raibley (2012) suggested, to explore this other history and justification for research on *well-being*, considering it as research on the good life and distinguishing it from research on the best life. In this sense, happiness and well-being would be seen as words that come close to and can complement each other, but can neither replace nor be considered part of each other. They would be, as Raibley (2012, p.1106) wrote: conceptually, metaphysically and empirically distinct.

References

Abbagnano, N. (2012) Dicionário de Filosofia (6th ed) [Dictionary of Philosophy]. São Paulo: WMF Martins Fontes.

Ahmed, S. (2010) The promise of happiness. Durham: Duke University Press.

Anderson, T. W. (1958) An Introduction to Multivariate Statistical Analysis. New York: Wiley.

Aristotle (1934) Aristotle in 23 Volumes, transl. H. Rackham. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Aristotle (1900) The Ethics of Aristotle, transl. John Burnet. London: Methuen.

Aristotle (1797) Aristotle's Ethics and Politics, transl. John Gillies. London: Printed for A. Strahan, and T. Cadell and W. Davies.

Bentham, J. (1823) An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Beraldi, A. C. R. (2010) Beatitude e sabedoria em Agostinho [Blessedness and wisdom in Saint Augustin]. MSc thesis, Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo, Vitória, Brazil.

Binkley, S. (2014) Happiness as enterprise: An essay on neoliberal life. Albany: Suny Press.

Bourriquant, F. (1614) Exhortation aux parisiens [Exhortation to Parisians]. Paris: To Fleury Bourriquant.

Brown, N. J. L., and Rohrer, J. M. (2020) 'Easy as (Happiness) Pie? A Critical Evaluation of a Popular Model of the Determinants of Well-Being', J Happiness Stud 21: 1285–1301. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-019-00128-4

Buffon, V. (2004) 'Happiness and knowledge in some Masters of Arts before 1250. An analysis of some commentaries on the Book I of Nicomachean Ethics', Patristica et mediaevalia, 25: 111-115. https://doi.org/10.7202/011360ar

Burkert, W. (1993) A religião grega na época clássica e arcaica [The greek religion in classic and archaic period], transl. M. J. Simões Loureiro. Lisboa: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian.

Centers, R., and Cantril, H. (1946) 'Income satisfaction and income aspiration.' The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 41(1): 64–69. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0053923

Centre National de Ressources Textuelles et Lexicales (2021) 'heur', https://www.cnrtl.fr/definition/heur, acessed 27 August 2021.

Cicero (1914) De finibus bonorum et malorum [On the ends of good and evil], transl. H. Rackham. London: William Heinemann.

Cicero (1877) Tusculan Disputations, transl. C.D. Yonge. London: H & Bros.

Chantraine, P. (1968) Dictionnaire Étymologique de la Langue Grecque: Histoire des mots [Etymological Dictionary of the Greek Language: History of words]. Paris: Éditions Klincksieck.

Comte-Sponville, A. (1997) Tratado sobre o Desespero e a Beatitude [Treatise on Despair and Beatitude]. São Paulo: Martins Fontes.

Curtis, A. (2002) Century of the self: Happiness machines for free [Film]. London: British Broadcasting Corporation.

Davies, W. (2016) The happiness industry: How the government and big business sold us well-being. London: Verso.

de Heer, C. (1969) Μάκαρ-Εὐδαίμων-Ὀλβίος-Εὐτυχής: A Study of the Semantic Field Denoting Happiness in Ancient Greek to the End of the 5th Century. Amsterdam: Hakkert.

Diener, E. (1984) 'Subjective Well-Being', Psychological Bulletin, 95(3): 542-575.

Diener, E. (2009) The science of well-being: The collected works of Ed Diener. Dordrecht: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-90-481-2350-6

Dinwiddy, J. R. (2004) Bentham: Selected Writings. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Disabato, D., Goodman, F. R., and Kashdan, T. B. (2019) 'A hierarchical framework for the measurement of well-being', pre-print: https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/5rhqj

du Châtelet, E. (1997) Discours sur le bonheur [Discourse regarding Happiness]. Paris: Editions Payot & Rivages.

Epicuro (2011) 'Letter to Menoikos by Epicurus (Ἐπίκουρος)', transl. Peter Saint-Andre. https://monadnock.net/epicurus/letter.html, acessed 27 August 2021.

Fernandes, R. F. and de Lima, F. L. (2019) 'Makarios: um estudo de etimologia e significado cultural' [Makarios: a study of etymology and cultural meaning], Το Ελληνικό Βλέμμα –

Revista de Estudos Helênicos da UERJ, 6: 68-85. https://doi.org/10.12957/ellinikovlemma.2019.48899

Friedman, H. L., and Brown, N. J. L. (2018), 'Implications of Debunking the "Critical Positivity Ratio" for Humanistic Psychology: Introduction to Special Issue', Journal of Humanistic Psychology, 58(3): 239–261. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022167818762227

Helvétius (1909) De l'esprit, De l'homme, notes, maximes et pensées, Le bonheur, lettres [Of the spirit, Of the man, notes, maxims and thoughts, Happiness, letters]. Paris: Mercure de France.

Holbach, P. (1795) Common sense: or, natural ideas opposed to supernatural. New York: n.p. https://archive.org/details/commonsenseornat00holb

Holdsworth, R. (1642) The Peoples Happinesse. A Sermon Preached in St. Maries in Cambridge, Upon Sunday the 27 of March. Cambridge: Roger Daniel. http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12024/A44134

Horace (1892) The Odes and Carmen Seculare of Horace, transl. John Conington. London. George Bell and Sons.

Kant, I. (2002) Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals. London: Yale University.

Lancaster, H. O. (1990) Expectations of Life: a study in demography, statistics, and history of world mortality. New York: Springer.

Lequinio, J. M. (1793) Discours sur l'éducation commune: prononcé dans la séance du 30 juillet [Speech on common education: delivered in the session of July 30]. Paris: De l'Imprimerie nationale. https://archive.org/details/discours00unse_15

Linton, M. J., Dieppe, P., and Medina-Lara, A. (2016) 'Review of 99 self-report measures for assessing well-being in adults: exploring dimensions of well-being and developments over time', BMJ open, 6(7): 1-16, https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2015-010641

Locke, J. (1689) An essay concerning human understanding. London: Ward, Lock, & Co.

Lomas, T., and Ivtzan, I. (2016) 'Second Wave Positive Psychology: Exploring the Positive–Negative Dialectics of Wellbeing', J Happiness Stud, 17: 1753–1768, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-015-9668-y

Lyubomirsky, S. (2008) The how of happiness: A scientific approach to getting the life you want. London: Penguin Press.

McMahon, D. (2004) 'From the Happiness of Virtue to the Virtue of Happiness: 400 B.C.-A.D. 1780', Daedalus, 133(2): 5-17, http://www.jstor.org/stable/20027908

McMahon, D. M. (2006) Happiness: A history. New York: Groove Press.

Morus, T. (1518) Utopia, n.p. https://archive.org/details/utopiaedition00moru

Muratori, L. A. (1749) Della pubblica felicita [About public happiness]. n.p. https://archive.org/details/dellapubblicafel00mura

Nadasen, P., Mittelstadt, J., and Chappell, M. (eds.) (2009) Welfare in the United States: A History with Documents, 1935–1996. New York: Routledge.

Newport, F. (2010) '75 Years Ago, the First Gallup Poll', Gallup News.

https://news.gallup.com/opinion/polling-matters/169682/years-ago-first-gallup-poll.aspx, acessed 27 August 2021.

OED Online (2021) 'hap, n.'. https://www.oed.com/viewdictionaryentry/Entry/84033, acessed 27 August 2021.

Oishi, S., Graham, J., Kesebir, S., and Galinha, I. C. (2013) 'Concepts of happiness across time and cultures', Personality & social psychology bulletin, 39(5): 559–577. https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167213480042

Raibley, J. R. (2012) 'Happiness is not well-being', Journal of Happiness Studies: An Interdisciplinary Forum on Subjective Well-Being, 13(6): 1105–1129. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-011-9309-z

Robertson, R. (2021) The Enlightenment: The Pursuit of Happiness. New York: Harper Collins.

Ryan, R. M., and Deci, E. L. (2001) 'On happiness and human potentials: a review of research on hedonic and eudaimonic well-being', Annual review of psychology, 52: 141–166. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.52.1.141

Ryff, C. D. (1989) 'Happiness is everything, or is it? Explorations on the meaning of psychological well-being', Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 57(6): 1069–1081. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.57.6.1069

Saussure, F. (1959) Extracts from Course in General Linguistics (ed. Charles Bally & Albert Sechehage), transl. Wade Baskin. New York: Philosophical Library.

Seligman, M. (2011) Flourish: A visionary new understanding of Happiness and Well-being. New York: Atria.

Seneca (1699) Seneca's Morals of a Happy Life, Benefits, Anger and Clemency, transl. Sir Roger L'Estrange. London: M. Bennet for Jacob Tonfon at Gray's-Inn-Gate.

Sewaybricker, L. E. (2017) Felicidade: utopia, pluralidade e política [Happiness: utopia, plurality and politics]. PhD thesis, University of São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil. https://doi.org/10.11606/T.47.2017.tde-05102017-175007

Skinner, B. F. (1972) Walden II: uma sociedade do futuro [Walden II]. São Paulo: Herder.

Stock, J. (1908) Stoicism. London: Archibald Constable & Co.

Volosinov, V. N. (1986). Marxism and the Philosophy of Language, transl. Ladislav Mareika and
I. R. Titunik. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Warr, P. (2007) Work, happiness, and unhappiness. London: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Watson, G. (1930) 'Happiness among adult students of education', Journal of Educational
Psychology, 21(2): 79–109. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0070539

Wierzbicka, A. (2004) '"Happiness" in Cross-Linguistic & Cross-Cultural Perspective', Daedalus,
133(2): 34-43. http://www.jstor.org/stable/20027911

Willig, C., and Rogers, W. S. (eds.) (2017). The SAGE handbook of qualitative research in
psychology (2ª ed). Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Wilson, W. R. (1967) 'Correlates of avowed happiness', Psychological Bulletin, 67(4): 294–306.
https://doi.org/10.1037/h0024431

Wordsworth, W. (1953) The prelude. Or growth of a poet's mind. (6th ed) Oxford: Oxford
University Press.