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ON HAPPINESS.

Foreword to the book

The Reasons of Happiness by Christian Boiron (President of Boiron Homeopathic Remedies Inc.)¹

(Boiron C., *Le ragioni della felicità*, Franco Angeli Publ., Milano, Italy, 2005)

Happiness. Everyone wants it, but not everyone believes it can be achieved. For many it does not belong to this life; for others it would come with the wealth they do not have. Still others believe it possible, but they look for it in the wrong places. Few have the courage to talk or write about it openly, and of these few, not all have actually come close to this experience and in some way savoured it, lived it. Christian Boiron is one of those who has: the clear, direct language that he uses and the examples that he offers show that he has not only studied the matter with attention and perseverance, but he practises it, he incarnates it in his daily experience of life.

When I read this book for the first time, I immediately noted many points that matched with my own personal experience and professional knowledge, as well as other aspects that were altogether new to me, and highly stimulating. I have been working in the field of emotional wellbeing (and the lack thereof) for years, and I believe that it depends largely on the following two (interconnected) factors: 1) the ability to manage conflicts in relations with others; 2) the ability to prevent and manage conflicts within ourselves.

Boiron deals above all with the second of these two factors and explains it masterfully.

But before going on to introduce some of the ideas presented in this important book I should like to give a brief sociological overview of the various attitudes and

¹ Boiron Inc. is the largest manufacturer of homeopathic products in the world. Headquartered in France, and with an operating presence in 59 countries worldwide, it employs a workforce of 3,723. In 2015, it had revenue of €609.74 million and a stock market value of approximately €1,800,000,000.

behaviours that people show towards happiness, and how they fit into the cultural context of our era. As we shall see, happiness actually has an absolute value – which is what Boiron talks about – and a relative value, dependent on the culture or sub-culture to which people belong, and on the characteristics of their personality. And the latter value often interferes with the former.

This is the case, for example, for those who feel strongly tied to the values of their traditional culture – who believe in the stability of society, the immutability of the human condition and of nature, the conservation of the status quo, the need to be guided by a higher authority – and who often consider happiness to be no more than an unachievable (and at times dangerous) utopia, at least in this world.

The opposite opinion is held by the ever-increasing sector of the population that believes in progress, technology and unlimited economic growth, and tends to consider happiness as a real - and indeed indispensable - possibility, but imagines it as something to be possessed, bought, earned through one's own outer actions, and thus linked with economic wealth, social status and personal success, fundamentally seeking it only in the realm of having – to use Fromm's definition – rather than in that of being (where it actually is).

Then there are those who have a critical view of both conservatism and progressivism, but allow themselves to be swept along by the tide of pessimism or nihilism, noticing only the most negative aspects of our era – from wars to terrorism, from ecological catastrophes to recession, from materialism to social injustice – without managing to find that hope and confidence in life that are indispensable conditions for happiness.

No-one, or almost no-one, from the above categories would buy a book like this, so if you have done so, it most likely means that you belong – maybe without realising it – to a fourth category: a rapidly growing minority consisting of people who believe in the value of individual and social evolution, but not following the techno-economical and merely materialistic path, who have a critical view, but not one of catastrophism or resignation, and who, behind the many crisis points of this moment in history, can also sense the other side of the coin, with its great potential for individual and collective growth. These people are moving towards new values and lifestyles, new forms of sensitivity and spirituality, new models of consumption, new ways of experiencing relationships with others, new individual and collective horizons marked by a renewed interest and enthusiasm for life, for the search for meaning, and for wellbeing. For these cultural forerunners, reasoning about happiness is not only meaningful, it is indeed one of the focuses of the search for meaning, one of the goals towards which their evolutionary path, and that of the entire human race, should orientate.

The American sociologist Paul H. Ray and the psychologist Sherry R. Anderson, who have performed some in-depth studies into the matter, estimate that this category includes around a quarter of the adult population of the USA, and have called these people “cultural creatives”, to emphasise the fact that they do not simply refuse the dominant culture, but at the same time seek and create new values and lifestyles².

Although these forerunners include diversified individuals and groups, they are

² Cf. Ray, P. H., Anderson S. R., *The Cultural Creatives*, Harmony Books, 2000.

united by certain shared ideals, such as: ecological sensitivity; attention to peace and interpersonal relations; interest in spirituality and personal growth; a lack of interest in flaunting their social position; equal rights between genders; social conscience; confidence and hope in the possibility that individuals and the community can evolve for the better. Furthermore, unlike the other two components of American society identified by Ray and Anderson (traditionalists and modernists), cultural creatives tend to keep at arms' length from hedonism, materialism and cynicism, whilst attaching great importance to the values of "authenticity" and "integrity". For this reason, many reject the culture of business, the media, consumerism. They are disenchanted with the idea of "having more things", but place great emphasis on having "new and unique experiences", and they represent the core market for alternative therapies and medicines, psychotherapy, personal growth courses and workshops and natural foods; they favour critical consumerism and tend towards the purchase of cultural rather than material products; they also actively produce culture, in the sense that they enjoy above-average involvement in the arts as amateurs or authors, writing books and articles, and participating in cultural meetings and workshops. They pay a lot of attention to themselves and their physical health, and spend time and money on wellbeing-oriented activities. The thread binding all these characteristics together is the belief that body, emotions, mind and spirituality should be part of the same whole – a holistic vision of the human being and his/her relationships with others and with the environment.

Naturally, you don't have to agree with all of the above aspects to be included in this category – being in tune with some of them is more than enough to distinguish yourself from the other categories previously mentioned.

The roots of these cultural forerunners can be sought on the one hand in the *profound criticism and cultural revision* triggered in the '60s and '70s and, on the other, in the *economic growth* that began after the Second World War³. The emergence of new world views and new values is due primarily to the inability of traditional cultures and religions to provide valid answers to the existential and spiritual needs of individuals today: those who approach emerging cultures are generally people who are disappointed and disillusioned with traditional paths, seeking concepts and methods that can provide a response to the new kinds of needs, problems and questions that typify human existence in our times. Of course, this kind of research would not have been possible were it not for the increase in economic and social wealth seen in the West after World War II. Indeed, as long as we are preoccupied with survival needs and the anxiety of uncertainty, it is not easy to think about quality of life or happiness. However, once a sufficient level of material wellbeing has been reached, many people begin to sense deeper needs, which go beyond the possession of goods or the achievement of high levels of social status.

In the emerging holistic view, the human being is considered as a meeting point of

³ Cf. Cheli E., *L'età del risveglio interiore. Autoconoscenza, spiritualità e sviluppo del potenziale umano nella cultura della nuova era*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2001. See also Cheli E., Morcellini M. (Ed.), *La centralità sociale della comunicazione. Da cenerentola a principessa*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2004.

four fundamental and interdependent dimensions: *the body, emotions, mind and spirituality* (or, as I prefer to define this fourth dimension, *expanded awareness*). If we are in touch with all four of these dimensions of our being, if we listen to them and cultivate them in a balanced way, our life gradually becomes healthier, more satisfying and fulfilling; if on the other hand we acknowledge only some and neglect or, even worse, negate the others, we create imbalance and thus malaise, suffering and illness, for example, by excessively favouring the mental sphere at the expense of the physical and emotional realms, or concentrating too hard on material aspects and neglecting emotional and spiritual ones. Materialism produces coldness and suffering by favouring the body and mind whilst denying the “heart” and spirituality, but those religions that emphasise spirituality and the “heart” whilst obscuring the other dimensions of human nature also produce suffering. The highway that leads to wellbeing and happiness is not in the mind, but neither is it in the body, in spirituality or in the emotions – rather, it is in the harmonious balance between all these dimensions; each of them represents only a part of our being, and if one part – whichever it may be – takes priority over the whole, conflict, and thus suffering, become unavoidable.

Happiness manifests itself automatically when we are in harmony with ourselves and with the outside world, and it fades away when we find ourselves in situations of open conflict. So, as Chinese medicine has argued for millennia, conflict – or rather, unresolved and prolonged conflict – is the prime cause of all dysfunction, be it physical, psychological or social.

When we speak of conflict we immediately think of external conflict: differences of opinion with colleagues, different expectations between ourselves and our partners, power struggles between children and parents, clashes between religions or civilisations, economic competition between nations, etc. However, we are also subject to an inner conflict, far less well-known but no less important to our wellbeing or lack of it, such as when our desire to eat conflicts with our desire not to put on weight, or sexual desire conflicts with our religious convictions or our idea of faithfulness. The inner world is anything but consistent, and within each person there are – albeit in different measure – convictions that contrast with other convictions or with particular needs, opposing desires, competing sub-personalities and so forth. This is due above all to the fact that right from childhood, some of our needs and some aspects of our character come into conflict with those of our parents or of other significant adults, and with the beliefs and values of the culture to which we belong, and this conflict is not resolved through communication and reconciliation, coming to a mutual agreement, but in an authoritarian, unilateral way. In the long term, this gives rise to a split in our personality, into two factions that fight against each other, and we end up handling this inner conflict in the same way in which the external conflict has been managed: one faction wins, the other loses. This does not resolve the conflict at all, but simply moves it into the depths of our unconscious, if anything making it even more treacherous.

It is precisely this unilateral and counterproductive conflict management (and the disharmony it produces) that keeps happiness out of our reach and drives us to seek false ideals, surrogates and illusory gratification. Until a few years ago, only psychotherapists (and not all of them) and a handful of academic psychologists and sociologists were convinced of this; now, however, thanks to remarkable

developments in the neurosciences, this hypothesis has also gained important confirmation in the neurophysiological field. In this regard, studies on the cerebral hemispheres have played a decisive role, illustrating how the outer part of the human brain (the cerebral cortex or neocortex) includes two distinct hemispheres, which perform different and often antagonistic functions, and produce different views of reality which are also potentially antagonistic⁴. Equally important are the studies by Paul Mac Lean⁵, which illustrated how the brain is not limited to the cerebral cortex, but also includes two other components: the limbic system (also known as the mammalian brain) and the hypothalamus (or reptilian brain). So basically, human beings do not have one brain, but three, each of which handles one of the dimensions already mentioned: the body (reptilian brain), feelings and emotions (mammalian brain), and the mind (neocortex). In theory, all these brains should work together for a person's survival, growth, fulfilment and happiness; in practice, however, they act in ways that are not always coordinated, and indeed are often conflictual, mainly because of the inadequate and contradictory upbringing and enculturation that the individual receives during childhood and adolescence. Based on the above studies and those of Henry Laborit and Jacques and Fanny Fradin⁶, the author of this book argues that the more the relationship between the three brains is harmonious, the closer the person gets to a state of wellbeing and happiness, whereas if there is conflict and disharmony the distance increases, leading to an increasing lack of wellbeing. Given that a concept such as "harmony between brains" makes little sense to a non-specialist, Boiron undertook the task of demonstrating how each brain manifests itself (in practice) through emotions, convictions, models of behaviour and conscious vision, and when and how one brain comes into conflict with another. The resulting model is very simple and elegant, and it is not only theoretical, but also provides valuable practical

⁴ Already in the second half of the 19th Century studies by P. Broca and then by J. Cotard found that lesions to certain specific areas of the left hemisphere cause aphasia, i.e., the inability to pronounce the words one has in mind. As from the 1960s, other researchers, including Roger Sperry and Michael Gazzaniga, performed in-depth research into the behaviour of people who had had their "corpus callosum" – the band of nerve fibres connecting the two hemispheres of the brain together – surgically removed. The results of these studies (which earned Sperry the Nobel prize in 1981) confirm the existence of profound differences between the functions of the two hemispheres; for instance, the left is dominant in linguistic processes, abstract thought and the logical-rational search for differences, and the right in emotional and intuitive processes and in metaphorical and analogical thought (cf. SPERRY, R.W., *Lateral specialization in surgically separated hemispheres*. In "Neurosciences Third Study Program". F. Schmitt and F. Worden (Eds.), Cambridge: MIT Press 3:5-19 (1974). SPERRY, R. W., *Mind-brain interaction: mentalism, yes; dualism, no*. In "Neuroscience" 5: 195-206 (1980). GAZZANIGA M. S., *The Bisected Brain*, Appleton, Century and Croft, New York, 1974.

⁵ Cf. MAC LEAN, P. *Triune Concept of Brain and Behaviour*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973.

⁶ Cf. LABORIT H., *La légende des comportements*, Paris, Flammarion, 1994. FRADIN J., *Trois cerveaux pour quoi faire: la psychophysio-analyse, une nouvelle vision du psychisme issue des sciences du système nerveux et du comportement*, Published by Institut de Médecine Environnementale, 1990.

instructions and suggestions within everyone's reach; of course, it does not guarantee the achievement of happiness, but it certainly sets you on the right path. How much of that path is actually travelled, and what level of happiness is attained will depend on the individual, and on his/her commitment and evolutionary level: no-one can give you happiness, or walk the path for you.

The path metaphor brings us back to the topic of economic wealth which, as we mentioned a few pages back, has been and is still considered by many to be the goal behind which happiness is hidden. Nonetheless, in the language of the three brains, economic wealth only enables us to satisfy the needs of the reptilian brain, and to some extent those of the mammalian brain, whilst it cannot influence an individual's numerous other important needs, from the emotional to the existential and spiritual; it can therefore be useful in seeking happiness, but only up to a point: it is like a train on which we can make the first stage of our journey, but we will then have to get off, and continue in other directions and using other means of transport. If we insist on staying on that train, we will miss our destination, because once we pass the right station, the increase in economic wealth does not bring us closer to happiness, indeed it only serves to distance us from it: due to stress, through the energy wasted in the fruitless search for mirages and surrogates, and above all because it leaves certain fundamental needs that do not depend on money unsatisfied.

As from the 1960s, American psychotherapists began to find themselves facing a new category of clients, who showed no material or social problems, and indeed, according to our cultural model, were successful people. As Charles Tart tells us "why were they going to a therapist? They had got everything that according to society would make them happy. And yet they complained of an empty life: 'There must be something more than this', 'it's all meaningless', 'I feel empty inside'. We began to speak of 'existential neurosis', or unhappiness based on an unsatisfied need for meaningfulness. Today this problem is even more common, because many more people have achieved material wealth and found it unsatisfactory"⁷.

Initially the most common reaction to this dissatisfaction is to aim for an even higher level of wealth and social status; but, however rich and important we become, the dissatisfaction does not go away, indeed it increases, until, in many cases, we hit the painful but beneficial crisis point, which forces us to reassess the values and goals that we have been pursuing, and to search in other, deeper directions. This is the moment when we have to get off the "train", stop, and take time to feel, deep inside ourselves, which dimensions of our being we have been neglecting and what further "nourishment" we need in order to experience our whole being in a more harmonious and satisfying way⁸.

Unfortunately, our culture and science are overabundantly well set-up in terms of material wealth (albeit not evenly distributed), whilst they have very little to teach

⁷ Charles Tart, *Transpersonal Psychologies*, Psychological Processes Inc., 1992 [back-translation from the Italian translation, Crisalide, Spigno Saturnia, 1994, pp. 10-11].

⁸ This does not mean abandoning one's work or one's belongings, but simply avoiding further increasing the time and energy invested in them, and indeed, possibly reducing them a little if we have gone too far beyond the station where we should have got off.

us as yet regarding the subsequent stages of the journey: only recently have we begun to look scientifically at the vast topics of quality of life, the development of human potential, constructive conflict management, emotional health, and happiness⁹. Only a few brave pioneers have ventured in that direction so far, and Boiron and his “masters” are among them. Many of the concepts and pointers contained in this book may be considered positive milestones in the new holistic science: a science that places the person at the centre, recognising and respecting his/her complexity of *body-emotions-mind-awareness*, and working for his/her individual and collective wellbeing, not in antagonism and competition with other human beings and the ecosystem, but in harmony with them. A science, what is more, that does not only speak to professionals in the field, but makes itself understood to everyone (albeit on different levels) and is translated into concrete suggestions and practical methods and techniques that can help us – with a little effort on our part – to considerably improve our quality of life and maybe – if there are enough of us – the quality of our society and of the planet where we live.

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⁹ See also: Cheli E., *Relazioni in armonia. Sviluppare l'intelligenza emotiva e le abilità comunicative per stare meglio con gli altri e con se stessi*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2004; and also the Web sites: www.corem.it - www.relazioniinarmonia.it