Foreword:

Traditionally, psychology has strongly defined itself through the analysis of psychological disturbances, psychological pain, and also with the investigation of negative emotional states (worry, depression, etc.). In the last twenty years interest in positive emotions has certainly intensified; health and well-being have become central issues in psychology.

The concept of positive psychology was formed above all in American psychology (*Positive Psychology*, comp. Seligman 2000; Snyder & Lopez 2002). After his revolutionary research into acquired helplessness and its connection to depression, Martin E.P. Seligman, one of the protagonists of this movement, suddenly turned his attention to the opposite psychological state of acquired optimism and, with this, built up a comprehensive positive psychology programme (see also http://www.psych.upenn.edu/seligman). I too have followed a similar path. After years of research work on the psycho-social effects of unemployment and stress I have tried to align myself, psychologically speaking, with the theme of happiness. (Mayring 1991). Behind research efforts of this kind lies the thought that health and well-being do not automatically start to be central goals of psychological work if illness and stress are eliminated.

A positive psychology programme, however, easily ends up in ideological suspicion. A one-sided view of happiness and well-being seen, as it were, through rose-tinted spectacles, could detract from many problem areas such as unhappiness and pain and draft a distorted picture of human existence. Through established empiric research within the context of psychological theoretical education this suspicion can be resisted. What is important here for filling in the gaps in research is concrete empiric work.

This is where Rotraut Walden’s book steps in with valuable material. The approach of an interactionistic perspective presents an important expansion of research within the framework of well-being. It is certain that the diverse results of empiric studies will have to be further concentrated on and brought to the point; we also still know too little about the suitability of the tools employed for the study (reliability and validity analysis). Nevertheless important results have emerged from the study.

Along with this it seems that consumption-oriented happiness situations are less central to the main concept itself than social situations. When we are happy we feel strong, alert, liberated, relaxed, sensitive, secure, and life seems worth living, whilst eating and drinking, watching television and withdrawal from life show no connection to happiness. Coping successfully with tasks, getting to know a partner and recognition within a group appear to be central to happiness. These results are attached to the western philosophies of happiness, which, since Aristotle’s conception of eudaimonia, see happiness as the most vital human goal, even in its social and not purely hedonistic form.

In conclusion, a most interesting work that gives much occasion for further thought and research.

Sources:

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