

HAPPINESS AS A BASIC SOCIAL EXPECTATION IN THE BIOCAPITALISM ERA

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At all times the human desire to be happy has been recognized as the engine of social transformations. The ability of individuals to live up different life scenarios associated with well-being and happiness has provided society with periods of relative stability. Today, in one of the areas of economic theory (economics of happiness or happiness economics) there are many criteria for assessing “subjective well-being” which are designed to help us measure the well-being of the whole society and choose the desired direction of economic and social policy. At the same time, today there is more and more evidence that in the new era – the era of biocapitalism – the attitude towards happiness has been substantially transformed. Also the limitations of “using” happiness as an engine of social progress have revealed themselves.

The transformation that has taken place, among other things, is due to the transition from the Fordist (industrial) system of capitalist production to the post-Fordist, biocapitalist system. A distinctive feature of biocapitalism is the blurring of the boundaries between work and leisure. In the capitalist model the worker had a clearly delineated time of work and time of leisure, which in the financial plane could be described as the time of making money and the time of spending it. The opportunity to spend money on satisfying one’s needs (which were largely influenced by advertising) gave an opportunity to transform people, in the words of President Herbert Hoover, into “constantly moving happiness machines”.

Under new conditions, the main focus is shifted from the production of material goods to the predominance of immaterial labor. The significance of labor, understood as Fordist production, is significantly reduced; key values are created not only by labor in the workplace, but by the whole person’s life. As a result the concept of “labor” begins to be interpreted extremely widely: labor extends and “captures” all areas of life. “Life,” states A. Gorz, “becomes the most expensive capital” [1, c. 35]. The boundary between private life and work is blurring, not because working and non-working activities require the same skills, but because all life becomes “a prisoner” of economic calculation. In such a society, “rational labor turns into a fundamental factor in human life” [2, c. 98]. Already from the mid-1980s, a tendency to justify labor as a means of achievement one’s social status, happiness and prosperity has arisen. Active job advertising, where it is presented as the only way to achieve prosperity and happiness, has led to narrow the space of leisure and effectively to minimize it [3].

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Now, in the situation where labor has become the main activity, the individuals have less and less time devoted to the direct “experience of happiness”. Happiness is becoming more and more delayed, withdrawn to a more distant future. The discourse, associated with a focus on future hopes, is noted by many researchers who devote their work to the spread of biotechnological innovations [4]. The discovery that the mere expectation of future happiness can increase the level of subjective well-being [5] has brought to life a variety of social and humanitarian technologies aimed at maintaining optimism and hope. However, today more and more facts indicate that such a maintenance of the hope of happiness cannot last infinitely. Today the World Health Organization recognizes depression as one of the main causes of disability in the world, and a number of scientists associate the growth of depression with the effects of capitalism [6]. A significant part of IT-specialists knows that from the age of 30 or 35 they are threatened with a “burn out” syndrome, a kind of mental fatigue, due to which work suddenly begins to seem boring, tiring and meaningless. Therefore, many of them during the period of intensive work are preparing to sell their venture and live on savings. The reason for this “burn out” is seen in the inability to return to leisure, which would not be associated with work.

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