

HAPPINESS: HAS IT GONE AWAY?

FELICIDADE: FOI-SE EMBORA?

FELICIDAD: TE QUEDASTE?

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Happiness has it gone away? written by three great thinkers: Frei Betto, Leonardo Boff and Mário Sérgio Cortella is a 130-page work published in 2016 by Editora Vozes, which consists of three parts: “*Quanto custa ser feliz?*” (How much does it cost to be happy?), woven by Frei Betto; “*Felicidade: não correr atrás de borboletas, mas cuidar do jardim para atraí-las*” (Happiness: not chasing butterflies, but looking after the garden to attract them), produced by Leonardo Boff; and the third and final part, “*Felicidade: uma presença eventual, um desejo permanente...*” (Happiness: an eventual presence, a permanent wish...) by Mario Sérgio Cortella.

Carlos Alberto Libânio Christo, better known as Frei Betto, is a Dominican friar, writer, graduated in Journalism, Anthropology, Philosophy and Theology. He is a member of the pastoral and social movements and has won the Jabuti award twice. Genézio Darci Boff, known as Leonardo Boff, is a writer, philosopher and theologian. He was a professor of systematic theology at the Franciscan Institute of Petrópolis, and later a professor of ethics, philosophy of religion and philosophical ecology at the State University of Rio de Janeiro. Mário Sérgio Cortella is a philosopher graduated from the College of Philosophy Nossa Senhora da Medianeira, master and doctor in Education with an emphasis on Curriculum at the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo, where he served as a professor in the Postgraduate Program in Education.

The authors weave this work based on a social, cultural, ideological and political perspective based on dialectics and human relations. They narrate about their experiences in

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different periods of their personal, professional and religious trajectory in which they were happy referring to philosophers, sociologists, economists, religious, writers, poets who dialogue and match their ideas, with their thoughts, with their reflections on the theme of happiness. They thus differ from a conception of human being based on a superficial and reductionist perspective: that linked to merchandise or means of consumption in a globalized world under the direct influence of capital. The authors also break with a capitalist ideology in which the human being is dependent on material goods to be/become happy. This book is, therefore, aimed at any audience interested in the theme of happiness and in what may be involved there from the different meanings attributed to this word, as well as the values that each reader understands to be and/or to have happiness, whether it is or is happy.

Furthermore, it constitutes an indispensable reading for professionals working in the field of Education, Language Sciences, Religious Sciences and Philosophy, also aimed at students in the respective fields of knowledge. Fluid reading in accessible and understandable language, which instigates the reader to dwell on the critical and enlightening thoughts of the authors regarding the most varied ways of problematizing what happiness is, be it: as a commodity, as a spiritual good, as Frei Betto discourses; or still centered on the care we have and/or should have with the planet Earth/Mother Earth/Gaia, making it sustainable in order to “find” happiness according to Leonardo Boff; or in a softer tessitura about this discussion preached by Frei Betto and Leonardo Boff, of the dichotomy of happiness versus means of consumption/capital, Cortella deals with happiness as sharing, in exchange with the other through simple, singular and transitory actions, therefore, discontinuous, as is the flow of our history, which is always in the process of learning, growing, being, becoming [more] human!

In the first part, Frei Betto (2016) criticizes that Happiness cannot be found, nor can it have its value from a society that is based primarily on consumer goods, on merchandise, based on capital. He opens the chapter asking: "**How much does it cost to be happy?**", Just as the author also asks himself: "Am I happy?" (BETTO, 2016, p. 11). Frei Betto (2016) discusses in his text reflecting on his choices, on his experiences during his existence, at the time of writing the book, until his arrival at the age of 71, in a world where people are even more concerned with having rather than being, therefore, are based on obtaining material goods than valuing human relationships.

In the view of Frei Betto (2016), however, very little is needed to live. The author states: “I have enjoyed little that many people consider essential to a happy life: money, comfort and easy access to sources of pleasure” (BETTO, 2016, p. 11, our translation). On the contrary, for Frei Betto (2016) having good health, having a roof, friends, having a family, not

having been hungry are senses that he considers to be sufficient for his existence. Therefore, “the meaning I gave to life brings me happiness” (BETTO, 2016, p. 13, our translation). In addition, for Frei Betto (2016), happiness is momentary, when we can enjoy these moments in the “company of the loved one; family lunch; the circle of friends; an interesting trip; the success achieved; contemplate the horizon from the top of a mountain...” (BETTO, 2016, p. 16, our translation). In other words, for the author, happiness emerges and/or is found in the simple gestures of everyday life, of/in/by the human relationship lived with the other (father, mother, brother, sister, friend, among others), the feelings of affection and affection intertwined in these social interactions, of solidarity. Against the grain is capitalism that commercializes people, the different social spheres (family, school, media, among others) and nature itself.

In the context of capitalism, as highlighted by Frei Betto (2016, p. 18, our translation), it “has not yet managed to commercialize the greatest good that we all seek: happiness”. This happiness is constituted from experiences that are subjective in/through the relationship with the other, and which is also considered as “a change in the state of consciousness” (BETTO, 2016, p. 19, our translation). The capitalist system based on capital/money does not seek to “form citizens”, “it wants to generate consumers”, as Frei Betto points out (2016, p. 19). Thus, it implies sowing, cultivating and disseminating values not of subjectivity, but of the objectivity of the consumer human being in which happiness is found and/or is the result of the combination of only material and non-social pleasures, based on a fixed model/ready for happiness.

This model starts to dominate a society which reverberates in the speeches, in the actions, in the ways of thinking, acting, feeling, being -, marked ideologically by the “happiness model, generally based on consumerism, to reinforce the market. And so, it creates a feeling of inferiority in those who do not fit the prevailing model” (BETTO, 2016, p. 31, our translation). In other words, the subjects feel frustrated, incapable and unhappy for not being able to ‘buy’ the desired happiness that brings pleasure and joy. It differs, therefore, from those values inscribed in friendship, in fidelity, in generosity, in solidarity, in otherness⁴, in which a more just, more fraternal society is located, since no one is happy alone, because alone nobody is enough” (BETTO, 2016, p. 28, our translation). Thus, happiness is

⁴ “For Bakhtin, it is in the relationship with otherness that individuals are constituted. The being is reflected in the other, refracts itself. From the moment the individual is constituted, he also changes, constantly. And this process does not arise from your own conscience, it is something that is consolidated socially, through interactions, words, signs. We are constituted and we are always transformed through the other. [...] Otherness is the foundation of identity. Relationship is the key word in Bakhtin's proposal. I only exist from the Other” (GEGe, 2009, p. 13-14, group’ highlights, our translation).

understood as a spiritual good, one that grants life to other lives, “that makes us love life without, however, becoming attached to it” (BETTO, 2016, p. 26, our translation).

In the sequence, Leonardo Boff (2016) weaves “**Happiness: not chasing butterflies but taking care of the garden to attract them**”. The author understands that “happiness never disappears from the human horizon; it is a tireless and endless search” (BOFF, 2016, p. 42, our translation). Happiness “is the result of building a garden, with affection and with a heart” (BOFF, 2016, p. 77, our translation). Therefore, happiness from this point of view is a meeting and mismatch, continuous and discontinuous based on the experiences and positions/choices that the subjects make in their life trajectory, in the relationship with the other. As it is revealed and assumed “a state of mind that cannot be measured and weighed, only experienced, [felt] and shared” (BOFF, 2016, p. 44, authors' highlights, our translation).

Happiness, still according to Boff (2016, p. 44, our translation) “needs to be cultivated, cared for and fed”. This, because the human being is a fragile being who needs affection, care, zeal, understanding to transcend his limitations and frustrations to seek/find the balance between body and mind. In this sense, the author criticizes the illusory industry of happiness called self-help.

This type of literature transmitted in a more accessible way to any public (for sale in pharmacies, supermarkets, bookstores, among others), neglects, camouflages and sometimes annuls, erases the true essence of being by offering an answer, a certainty, a 'momentary cure', a superficiality that reinforces the utopian character of happiness, that one sold as merchandise, as a consumer good for immediate relief of symptoms and complaints of suffering, sadness, frustration, as opposed to a “true happiness”, “sustainable happiness”, that which is found in the “depth of life” (BOFF, 2016, p. 48-52, our translation).

Boff (2016) is concerned with this rampant consumption, of wanting more, always more, that people and objects are instituted as goods in the incessant search for this happiness that is, to a certain extent, bought. Merchandise is driven by capital and tangent to not caring for the planet Earth / Mother Earth / Gaia / Common House, not caring for oneself and the environment in which we live, therefore, not sustainable. For the author, this planet is interconnected, interdependent and all its parts are interrelated. The happiness of Mother Earth, as pointed out by Boff (2016, p. 57, our translation) “implies [and requires] that we take care of each ecosystem, understanding the singularities of each one; their resilience, their ability to reproduce and maintain collaborative and mutual relationships with all other beings in presence, since everything is related and inclusive”.

Therefore, it is worth thinking about happiness in this relationship of welcoming, caring, affection, sustainability with Mother Earth and with the human being, as the author guides. This is because one depends on the other for their existence and survival since they are interconnected. Thus, competes us to understand ourselves as human beings, to plan and apply a sustainable way of life without causing so many impacts on nature and, consequently, on the lives of others and ourselves. Looking endogenously, personally and subjectively, requires, complementing the thinking of Frei Betto (2016), which brings us happiness, that is, the “human relationship, friendship, love, generosity, compassion and respect, realities that have a lot of value, but are priceless” (BOFF, 2016, p. 66, our translation). Happiness built day after day, in each moment, unique, singular, of feeling, of truth, of simplicity, shared, solidary, which implies, therefore, in “*being happy*” (BOFF, 2016, 75, author' highlights). Happiness that requires involvement, engagement, participation, proactivity from people who start to dialogue, exchange ideas, feelings, experiences, and thus, they learn from the different and, mutually start to trace their paths, their life trajectories in communion with this other. Happiness that “will never be full and complete due to the lack of plenitude of our existence in this world” (BOFF, 2016, p. 78, our translation).

Finally, Cortella (2016) in the third and last part “**Happiness: an eventual presence, a permanent desire...**” leads his reflections, looking at a happiness that is constituted / felt / experienced from sharing, overflowing, from simplicity, spirituality. Happiness that makes human beings feel productive, alive, as the author points out, which has to do with “fertility”, with “vibration” (CORTELLA, 2016, p. 83). For Cortella (2016), happiness is abundance, it is absence, it is an eventual occurrence, it is intensity, it is transitory, it is circumstantial, it is authentic. It is never continuous, it is never permanent, it is never the same, just as we are not, if we are, we will be repeatable, we will not vibrate, we will not overflow, we will not learn, as the author points out. Being repeatable, we become automatic like machines, so we lose our authenticity and our ability to lead ourselves through challenges, obstacles, adversities and moments of happiness.

According to Cortella (2016, p. 108, our translation) “you are happy when you are what you do, what you say and what you show. It leaves you whole, life vibrates more strongly. [...] authentic is one that coincides with oneself”. In this way, the author guides the reader to look within himself and proposes, thus, that he pay attention to the world in which he is inserted, occasionally, regarding exposure in digital media (social networks) based on a sharing that shows up in order to show a 'happy' post (photo, video) almost instantly, compulsively. And, in this perspective, does Cortella (2016, p. 110, our translation) question

that “[the] person needs to identify whether what he likes is to do what he does or to show that he is doing it”? It should also be said that the need to return these posts, based on positive or negative comments, can lead a person to "happiness" or "unhappiness" that is not real, because it is linked to the “idea that I need being seen in order to be happy” (CORTELLA, 2016, p. 111, our translation).

Therefore, these practices, which are more and more frequent in the virtual/digital environment, lead people to produce a happiness that in fact does not exist, is created, but is not fed, cultivated, shared in the sense of feeling good with the moment of happiness that the other presents from an image or a video. In this way, the population ends up being hypnotized, reducing their project of happiness to immediate pleasure and how many “likes” this immediate provides them with. Thus, like material conditions, consumer goods are not real products of happiness. Happiness is not a product you buy around the corner. Happiness goes further, it is about relationships of affection, care, welcoming others, relationships that are human and not material. Thus, as the “happiness found in spirituality is only when I have the idea of gratitude” (CORTELLA, 2016, p. 130, our translation). To thank for being happy, for living and learning daily in adversity and success, for learning from others, in society, in sharing.

Thus, from the writings of Frei Betto, Leonardo Boff and Mário Sérgio Cortella (2016) in “Happiness has it gone away?”, We understand that we do not have and will never have control of our actions many times, nor of the actions of the other, “because life is process, process is change and change is also for unwanted directions” (CORTELLA, 2016, p. 119, our translation). We do not know, so there is no certainty or how to foresee what is to come. There are assumptions. In the meantime, it is up to us to live each day, one day at a time, with people we love and want close by, with activities we like to do (walking, travelling, among others). As Cortella (2016, p. 115, our translation) points out “[...] as strange as it may seem, it is in the collapse that you will learn. If you do not learn in care, you learn from the wrong fact”. In other words, used in daily life as the popular saying “you can learn in love or in pain”. Happiness, as approached/discussed and problematized by Frei Betto, Leonardo Boff and Mário Sérgio Cortella (2016), requires (re)thinking, reflecting, finding, missing, going forward, going back, going again.

Is happiness gone? According to Cortella (2016), sometimes it goes and can come back. It will depend on our way of seeing, understanding, learning, feeling, acting, being and the choices and positions we take/assume socially, historically and ideologically. It will depend on whether we want to take risks, vibrate, cultivate, share, be supportive and welcome

others as well. It will depend in parts, on me, and in parts of the actions I perform in/about/with the other and the different values, beliefs, creeds, experiences that constitute us and constituted us in/by/with life in/by/with respect to the other. Happiness finds us and, also, we find it when we are open to learn, to dialogue, to share, to welcome and to live (with)in society and when we expect nothing from it, as well as we expect nothing from the other, because each one is each, and follows his life, some straight, others crooked, but free to choose or be chosen by actions, feelings that can and generate happiness.

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