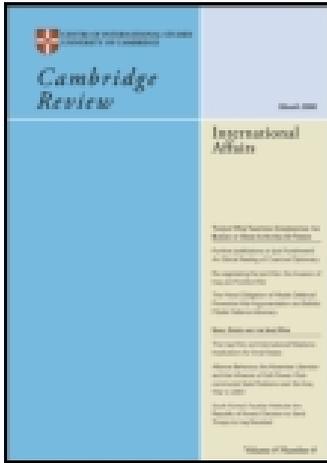


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### The political economy of human happiness: how voters' choices determine the quality of life

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Senators during the 2010 presidential elections and linking the Gingrich group to the new Senate combatants, the infamous Tea Party members (chapters 10–11). The prediction of a further escalation—unless there be a remarkable elite reshuffle—sounds, therefore, convincing and empirically grounded.

These qualities make *The Gingrich Senators* a thought-provoking work not only for students of US politics but for anyone interested in institutional transition or in traversing the slippery concept of partisanship.

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Benjamin Radcliff, *The political economy of human happiness: how voters' choices determine the quality of life*, Cambridge, United Kingdom, Cambridge University Press, 2013, ISBN 9781107644427 (pbk), 205 pp

What makes this book so unique is that it stands as one of the very few and the first major treatment of the relationship between explicitly *political* factors and human happiness. For most of its existence, the field of 'happiness studies' has been dominated by psychologists who, in the 'positive psychology' tradition, focus entirely on one's inner life, implicitly suggesting that happiness is largely up to us. Economists similarly have left their mark on the field, focusing their attention on how the objective conditions of life affect happiness, but focusing largely upon questions about the relationship between economic growth and happiness, or, at the individual level, how elastic happiness is with respect to changes in income. This is the first major book on the subject written by a political scientist, focusing on the political. Radcliff seeks to determine what kinds of public policies—in the end, left or right policies—best promote human well-being.

This book is of particular interest to students of politics for two reasons. The first is its theoretical focus, rooted (as chapter 1 details) in the writings of participants in the American and French Revolutions. Radcliff goes on to argue, contra the conventional wisdom, that it is public policies that ultimately determine the overall quality of life. He argues (for example, 127) that in the end political outcomes, such as the size and generosity of the welfare state, have 'enormous' impacts on well-being, such that their magnitude 'dwarfs' the effect of the standard individual-level determinants of happiness, such as unemployment or rewarding personal relationships. Happiness, then, is something that is 'a political good—that is, one whose level is determined by the political choices of governments that citizens elect' (7).

His approach is grounded in a class-analytical understanding of both economics and politics. He begins with the idea that it is work and the day-to-day struggle to make ends meet that is the foundation of happiness. From here he develops (chapter 2) a conceptual model of market society in which (to simplify more than the nuanced analysis really allows) politics becomes largely a second-order political struggle between classes, in which workers attempt to improve their well-being by creating political agreements—labour unions, the welfare state, protective labour market regulations—that supplement or alter labour market outcomes to best provide the material and psychological resources necessary for the greatest satisfaction with life. These efforts are resisted in turn by (crudely put) the capital-owning class, who naturally wish to maintain conditions most consistent with their (typically ideologically opposed) interests.

The beginning point of Radcliff's analysis is the relationship between employers on the one hand and workers (and their families) on the other. 'My strategy', he writes, is to 'focus on the most basic aspect of human life—our need to survive and to flourish—on the logic that the structure of this fundamental part of life will systematically affect its other aspects' (186). As the need to 'survive and flourish' depends in a market economy upon 'the sale of one's labor power as a commodity', it is here that we should find any theory of human well-being. While Radcliff ultimately agrees with most other scholars that the key to happiness is found outside the market—as in fulfilling human relationships—he traces our ability to succeed in finding the non-market determinants of happiness to our position in the labour market.

More startling still, perhaps, are the empirical analyses that take up the bulk of the book (chapters 5–7). Radcliff asks how each of the public policy domains noted above affects human well-being. He finds very strong and consistent evidence, using a variety of sophisticated econometric modelling techniques, and considering evidence both cross-nationally and across the American states, that 'big government', organized labour and pro-labour market regulations positively affect human well-being for all strata of society (177). While the effects of the welfare state or a strong labour movement are marginally higher for lower- and middle-income people, Radcliff argues that they benefit everyone 'regardless of one's income or social status' (178).

The book is elegantly written and presented, and the econometrics sufficiently softened by an accessible presentation, such that it makes a promising 'first book' on the scientific study of subjective well-being for those new to the field. But the book's aims are, as the discussion above suggests, much more ambitious. To a tremendous extent, Radcliff succeeds both in developing a powerful theory of

well-being and demonstrating equally powerful empirical connections between the social democratic project and human happiness. While the book is not above criticism (conservatives, for instance, are unlikely to be moved by Radcliff's treatment of Hayek or satisfied by his elaboration of the arguments against social democratic institutions), it cannot be denied that this is easily the best book yet produced on how, empirically, politics affects people's actual lives.

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Charles Emmerson, *1913: the world before the great war*, London, Bodley Head, 2013, ISBN 13 9781847922267 (hbk), ISBN 10 1847922260, 528 pp

When asked what skills it takes to become an international relations (IR) scholar,<sup>1</sup> John Mearsheimer, a leading figure in the discipline, made a compelling case for a solid and wide knowledge of history and invited young scholars to read history as widely as possible—to make parallels and links between historical episodes and to reflect on patterns and lessons. Stress ought to be placed on patterns and lessons, not on almost law-like statements and theories to be generalized regardless of time, place and context.

Charles Emmerson in his *1913* seems to have followed Mearsheimer's advice. Emmerson is an Oxford-trained historian who turned to IR and is now Senior Research Fellow at the Royal Institute for International Affairs in London. *1913* is surely a book of history, not of IR. Yet it lends itself easily and aptly to those parallels and connections underpinning IR as a discipline.

The book is structured around an attempt to elucidate the cultural and political climate of 23 cities that in their own ways represented the mood and signs of the time—the period Eric Hobsbaum called the 'age of empire'. The point of departure is London, the centre of the British Empire and of the 1913 world order; we then get a sweeping tour of life in the major capitals of Europe, followed by a lucid portrayal of the expectations and anxieties in the major cities of the booming United States (US). The journey continues to the frontiers of the British Empire, through Argentina and Algeria, and on to the Middle East. Finally, the metropolises of the 'twilight powers' (347) are brought back to life. The book

<sup>1</sup> University of California, 'Conversations with history', Harry Kreisler interviews John J Mearsheimer, <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AKFamUu6dGw>>, accessed 27 September 2013.