REVIEW SYMPOSIUM

introduction: the political economy of human happiness

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advance online publication, 25 September 2015; doi: 10.1057/eps.2015.53

Book reviewed:
The Political Economy of Human Happiness: How Voters' Choices Determine the Quality of Life
Benjamin Radcliff, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 205 pp., ISBN 978-1107644427

Abstract
In *The Political Economy of Human Happiness: How Voters' Choices Determine the Quality of Life*, Benjamin Radcliff considers a wide variety of data from North America and Europe and argues that, on balance, welfare state policies make people happier. In short, there is a positive correlation and a causal relationship between happiness and welfare state provisions. This is an important conclusion for anyone interested in public policy and debates about the size of government. In their reviews, Larry M. Bartels and William A. Galston take issue with Radcliff's thesis. They challenge the relationships that Radcliff suggests exist between specific policies and happiness. Bartels challenges the way Radcliff uses his statistics to support his thesis about the relationship between happiness and specific policies as well as our ability to make generalisations from the data. Galson's objections to Radcliff's analysis and argument is more conceptual, and, among other things, he challenges the connection Radcliff seeks to establish between happiness and the satisfaction of human needs.

Keywords big government; happiness; human well-being; life satisfaction; welfare state

What makes people happy? For political scientists, this universal question becomes the question of what sort of policies make people happy. In *The Political Economy of Human Happiness: How Voters' Choices Determine the Quality of Life*, Benjamin Radcliff considers a wide variety of data from North America and Europe and argues that, on balance, welfare state policies make people happier. In short, there is a positive correlation and a causal relationship between happiness and welfare state provisions: 'the surest way to maximize the degree to which people positively evaluate the quality of their lives is to create generous, universalistic, and truly decommodifying welfare states'. This is an important conclusion for anyone interested in public policy and debates about the size of government. In their reviews of Radcliff's book for this book review symposium, Larry M. Bartels and William

A. Galston take issue with Radcliff's thesis. They challenge the relationships that Radcliff suggests exist between specific policies and happiness. Bartels challenges the way Radcliff uses his statistics to support his thesis about the relationship between happiness and specific policies as well as our ability to make generalisations from the data. Galson's objections to Radcliff's analysis and argument is more conceptual, and, among other things, he challenges the connection Radcliff seeks to establish between happiness and the satisfaction of human needs.

a first step toward happiness

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doi:10.1057/eps.2015.53

In *The Political Economy of Human Happiness*, Benjamin Radcliff poses a fundamental question for politics and political science: 'what specific public policies contribute to better lives?' (1). His immodest aspiration of providing 'an objective, empirical answer to this question' (4) will rightly warm the hearts of those who see political science as a tool for social progress rather than a mere collection of intellectual puzzles. At the same time, I suspect that most of his readers will be strongly predisposed on ideological grounds to accept the substance of his answer: that 'the surest way to maximize the degree to which people positively evaluate the quality of their lives is to create generous, universalistic, and truly decommodifying welfare states' (177).

Radcliff conveys a strong impression that the analyzes presented in his book provide overwhelming support for this thesis. 'The empirical findings and theoretical arguments advanced in prior chapters', he writes at the beginning of his concluding chapter (177) 'do not by this point require further rehearsal. They can be summarized most succinctly. In the debate between Left and Right over the scope or size of the state, it is eminently clear that 'big government' is more conducive to human well-being'. Thus, in a slim volume of fewer than 200 pages – including perhaps forty pages of empirical analysis – our intrepid author claims to have resolved one of the most profound and important quandaries of contemporary politics.

Alas, 'objective, empirical' social science seems to me to be a great deal more difficult than Radcliff suggests, leaving his 'eminently clear' prescription for well-being less well-supported than he supposes. That is not to say that it is wrong – only to hope that social scientists, including Radcliff, will continue to explore the impact of welfare states on human happiness in a variety of directions in the years to come, rather than prematurely declaring (as a US president famously did) our 'mission accomplished'.

Radcliff's general empirical strategy is common enough in contemporary cross-national research. His evidence consists of a series of complex, highly abstract multiple regression analyses relating life satisfaction to various measures of welfare state generosity. In just the first three tables (5.1, 5.2 and 5.3) he reports 12 distinct analyses including 32,000 to 59,000 individual observations of life satisfaction, six different measures of welfare state policies (each considered separately), interactions between welfare state policies and individual income, and as many as 19 'control variables', plus dozens of unreported 'dummy variables' representing specific countries and years. Several of the 'control variables' – financial satisfaction, social capital, marriage, personal health, unemployment, church attendance – have powerful estimated effects on life satisfaction in their own right and are plausibly related to welfare state policies in complicated ways, as causes or consequences or both. My teacher and collaborator Achen (2002: 446) once argued that 'A statistical specification with more than three explanatory variables is meaningless'. One need not go that far to be thoroughly perplexed by Radcliff's regression coefficients. But Radcliff's own efforts to untangle all of this complexity are mostly limited to a six-page appendix (136–141) providing brief descriptions of additional analyses.

In these individual-level analyses Radcliff employs 'fixed effects' for countries, which he argues 'account for long term national-level factors, such as a country's culture, history, and level (and type) of economic development' (120). While that is true (at least in a generous interpretation of the phrase 'account for'), the 'fixed effects' also 'account for' cross-national differences in the history and average level of welfare state generosity.[1] Thus, Radcliff's statistical leverage for assessing the impact of welfare states on life satisfaction in these analyses comes entirely from relating *changes* in welfare state generosity to *changes* in life satisfaction within each of his countries over fairly short periods of time. Since we – literally – never see Radcliff's data (there is not a single graph in the book), it is hard to grasp the implications of that fact for his conclusions. Figure 1, which is based on my own rudimentary analysis of the data employed by Radcliff, provides a graphical summary of the within-country relationships between generosity and life satisfaction in the countries and years covered by his analysis.[2]

As cross-national analyses go, this one is fairly encouraging. The positive relationship between welfare state generosity and life satisfaction posited by Radcliff appears in most of the countries considered separately, despite the fact that there are no more (and sometimes fewer) than four survey observations for each. However, it is clear from the figure that some countries experienced so little variation in welfare state generosity during this period that they contribute little to the analysis, while others are much more influential. For example, excluding

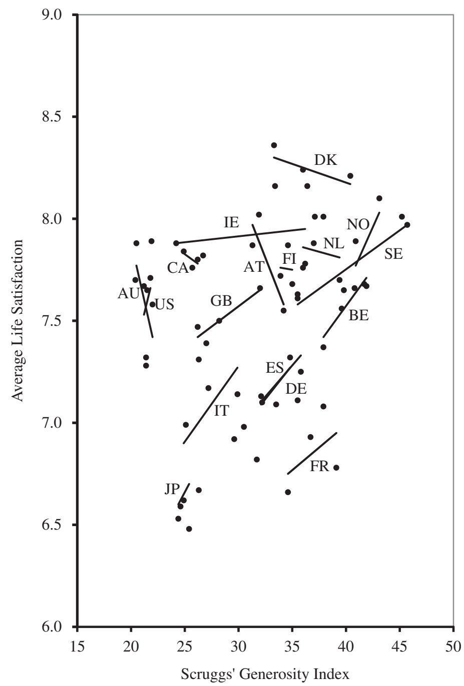

Figure 1 Welfare states and life satisfaction (country-years, 1981–2009).

Sweden (SE) from this analysis would reduce the overall *t*-statistic for the effect of welfare state generosity from 1.9 (close to the magical but arbitrary threshold of 'statistical significance') to 1.4 (still substantial evidence of a positive effect, but inconclusive by conventional standards).[3]

The nature of temporal variation in welfare state generosity within countries further complicates the interpretation of Radcliff's statistical results. In most cases, the observed changes in welfare policies in the period covered by the survey data are monotonic, or nearly so. Indeed, there does not seem to be *any* country in which life satisfaction clearly responded to *both* increases and decreases in welfare state generosity in the period covered by Radcliff's analysis. Thus, any unmeasured cause of life satisfaction that changed monotonically within a given country is likely to be strongly correlated with welfare state generosity, producing a biased estimate of the impact of welfare policies on life satisfaction.[4]

Figure 2 provides a more detailed picture of the relationship between welfare state generosity and life satisfaction in two countries, Sweden and Denmark. The dotted lines (single for Sweden, double for Denmark) represent the average level of life satisfaction in each country in four successive surveys conducted over a span of almost three decades. The solid lines (again, single for Sweden, double for Denmark) represent annual measures of welfare state generosity. This simple plot calls attention to a variety of questions of the sort that a thorough empirical analysis of life satisfaction ought to address.

First, the figure indicates that Danes have generally been a good deal happier than Swedes despite having a less

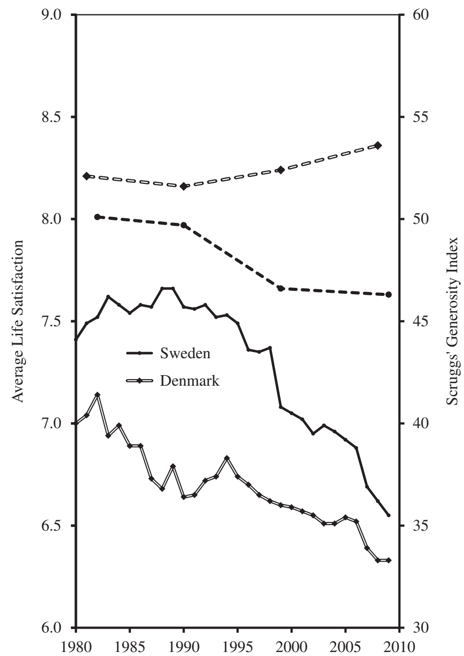

Figure 2 Welfare states and life satisfaction in Sweden and Denmark.

generous welfare state. This difference is captured in Radcliff's individual-level analyses by unreported 'dummy variables', but that approach obscures the interesting question of why two countries with broadly similar histories and cultures would have such different average levels of life satisfaction. Perhaps the 'control variables' in his separate country-level analyses help to account for this difference; perhaps not. Obviously, it is not incumbent upon Radcliff to explain every aspect of life satisfaction in every country covered by his analysis. Nevertheless, *some* sustained discussion of alternative bases of well-being seems necessary to support the claim that welfare states are 'the single most powerful' determinant of life satisfaction (7).

Second, the figure indicates that both countries experienced similarly substantial declines in welfare state generosity over the period covered by Radcliff's analysis, but only Swedes experienced a concomitant decline in life satisfaction, while Danes actually became happier as their welfare state shrank. (This fact is reflected in the contrasting positive and negative slopes for Sweden and Denmark in Figure 1.) Again, there is no reason to demand that Radcliff offer a convincing explanation for this specific difference; but *some* sustained discussion of anomalous cases would help to shed light on the limits of his argument. Might the contrast between Denmark and Sweden reflect a difference in the timing of welfare state retrenchment (gradual in the former case, more precipitous in the latter case)? Or in the social context in which it occurred? Or in the nature of the specific welfare programs that were cut back? Is it possible that welfare state generosity has diminishing marginal returns with respect to life satisfaction? Radcliff never raises, much less resolves, any of these questions.

Third, the apparent relationship between declining welfare state generosity and declining life satisfaction in Sweden raises the additional question of timing. How quickly should we expect policy changes to produce changes in well-being? Radcliff never says. It is clear from Figure 2 that much of the decline in welfare state generosity that is supposed to have contributed to the decline in life satisfaction in Sweden between 1990 and 1999 occurred *in* 1999. What policy changes produced such a sudden, substantial decline in welfare state generosity? And is it plausible that a significant contraction of the welfare state could have had such an immediate effect on life satisfaction? In answering that question, it might be helpful to know when the 1999 Swedish survey was in the field – a detail far too minor to attract Radcliff's attention.[5] But more generally, it would be helpful to consider much more carefully the short- and long-term effects of welfare state expansion and retrenchment.

This is not an isolated example of inattention to concrete cases. The twenty-one countries included in Radcliff's analysis are listed for the first and only time in a footnote on page 119; most of them are never mentioned in the text. The one country that receives more detailed attention (in a separate chapter) is the United States, where differences in welfare policies and labor union density across the fifty states are said to produce significant differences in life satisfaction. Here, too, we get complex regression analyses with a slew of 'control variables', including unreported dummy variables for regions and years. Yet, according to Radcliff (174), the results are 'easily summarized' and 'entirely consistent with the cross-national patterns'.

As it happens, geographical variation in US life satisfaction is also the focus of a recent paper by economists Edward Glaeser, Joshua Gottlieb, and Oren Ziv. According to Glaeser and his colleagues (2014: 35), the happiest places in America, controlling for individual income and demographic characteristics include Mississippi, Louisiana, Georgia, northern Florida, Montana, and parts of Arizona; the least happy places include the Northeast corridor (from Massachusetts to Maryland), the Rust Belt (from Ohio to Missouri), and the major cities of the Pacific Coast. To anyone familiar with American politics and public policy, it would be hard to imagine a more spectacular contradiction of Radcliff's claim that happiness stems from generous welfare policies and labor union density.

This is not to suggest that Glaeser and his colleagues are right and Radcliff is wrong about the distribution of life satisfaction in the US Neither analysis is sufficiently detailed and transparent to warrant great confidence in its inferences. The key point here is the striking difference in their implications for Radcliff's argument. Clearly, competent analysts employing similar data can come to very different conclusions about the where and why of well-being.

No forty pages of empirical analysis, however insightful and sophisticated, could be expected to resolve these and many other daunting problems of inference in connecting public policies and life satisfaction. Where Radcliff goes wrong, in my view, is not in failing to resolve these problems. It is in failing to acknowledge that they exist. As a result, his 'eminently clear' answer to the pressing question of 'what specific public policies contribute to better lives' seems decidedly premature (177 and 1). Of course, he deserves significant credit and praise for posing the question – a substantial contribution in its own right – and for beginning to supply an answer. But those are just the first steps on a long journey toward developing (and implementing!) a political science of human happiness.

Notes

1 In separate country-level analyses these 'fixed effects' are omitted, but once again the regression specifications include a variety of powerful 'control variables' that seem causally entangled with welfare state policies in complex ways – social capital, individualism, Catholicism, economic growth, and unemployment. Thus, the results of these analyses are equally difficult to interpret as evidence of the impact of broad differences in welfare state policies.

2 My attempt at replication, limited as it is, is no doubt inexact. Radcliff (119) lists 21 countries included in his study and refers somewhat imprecisely to 'five waves between 1981 and 2007' of survey data from the World Values Survey, but never specifies exactly which country-years are included in his various analyses. My own analysis includes 69 country-years (from 1981 through 2009) for which survey data on life satisfaction in Radcliff's countries are available online, either from the World Values Survey (http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/wvs.jsp) or from the European Values Survey (http://www.europeanvaluesstudy.eu), and for which data on Scruggs' (2014) welfare state generosity index are available from the Comparative Welfare Entitlements Dataset (http://cwed2.org/, TOTGEN).

3 Radcliff's closest parallels to this analysis, reported in Tables 5.4 and 5.6 (130 and 134), produce *t*-statistics of 3 for the effects of welfare state policies on life satisfaction. Unfortunately, given the substantial role in these analyses of 'control variables' potentially confounded with welfare state policies, it is impossible to guess how these remarkably precise estimates emerge from Radcliff's data or what they mean.

4 Radcliff's analyses include 'fixed effects' for years; but these will only absorb the effects of unmeasured causes of life satisfaction to the extent that they follow similar trends (and have similar effects) in every country.

5 The answer – mid-November 1999 through mid-February 2000 – seems favorable from the standpoint of a purported immediate effect of welfare state contraction in 1999 on life satisfaction; but is even this implied time scale plausible?

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happiness in question

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doi:10.1057/eps.2015.53

The thesis of this book is easy to summarize, and the author does so briskly:

In the argument between Left and Right over the size of the state, I demonstrate that 'big government' is more conducive to human well-being, controlling for other factors. Indeed, the single most powerful individual- or national-level determinant of the degree to which people positively evaluate the quality of their lives is the extent to which they live in a generous and universalistic welfare state … Similarly, people find life more rewarding when a larger share of the economy is 'consumed' by government through the 'taxing and spending' that allows for the maximum provision of public services, such as education or healthcare (7).

Because I lack the methodological competence to critique the quantitative aspects of Radcliff's argument, I will instead focus some complications and anomalies.

In the first place, as Radcliff's data show, generous social provision is far from the only determinant of subjective well-being. Age is highly correlated with happiness, as are financial satisfaction, social capital, church attendance, marital and employment status and personal health. Intuitively, some of these factors can have a greater impact on individual happiness than does the size of the welfare state. In the event of serious illness, no doubt access to high-quality health care is preferable. But the difference between being sick and being well has a greater effect on how we experience the quality of our lives than does the availability of medical treatment. Similarly, it is doubtful that moving from the United States to Sweden would suffice to trump the subjective consequences of moving from marriage to an unmarried state, typically a tumultuous process.

Second, Radcliff's data set cuts off at 2007 – right before the financial collapse and the Great Recession. One wonders how the ensuing seven years would affect the story Radcliff tells. Across Europe, the epicenter of generous social provision, overall unemployment is more than twice as high as in the United States and the United Kingdom, and nearly one quarter of all young adults in Europe are without work. This is a significant difference if, as Radcliff suggests, 'being unemployed is one of the strongest correlates of unhappiness [and] frequently emerges as the single most important factor in determining levels of happiness' (102).

To be sure, Radcliff might well reply that for any given level of unemployment, being in a country with a sturdy social safety net is more conducive to satisfaction than is being left to fend for oneself. But that raises a question that he touches on, but does not resolve: what if there is a negative correlation between the security that a welfare state can provide and aggregate levels of unemployment? It is easy to find evidence suggesting that this is the case. A number of studies have found that as unemployment compensation becomes more generous, the incentive to seek work diminishes and the average period of unemployment becomes longer. In addition, measures that make employment more secure – by making it more difficult for employers to fire workers – can also create incentives not to hire new workers who enjoy these protections. Throughout much of Europe, these practices have contributed to the development of a two-tier labor market in which incumbent workers enjoy something close to life tenure while others are either contingently employed or jobless. Security and rigidity can be two sides of the same coin.

There is a further difficulty: If Radcliff's theory is valid across countries, it should apply within countries as well. As a country's welfare state expands, the aggregate level of satisfaction within that country should increase. At least in the case of the United States, there is no evidence of such a correlation. Between 1972 and 2006, the share of US GDP going to programs such as Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid expanded dramatically, as did pensions for civilian and military public employees. But a comprehensive survey conducted by the Pew Research Center (2006) found no increase in aggregate subjective satisfaction over that thirty-five year period. Indeed, the shares of the population reporting that they were 'very happy', 'pretty happy' or 'not too happy' barely budged.

A closer inspection of the Pew data suggests an explanation: the relationship between other key correlates and subjective happiness did not change either. For example, the linear relationship between self-reported happiness and income was almost the same in 1972 and 2006. At every income level, Republicans have been happier than Democrats during that period. In every age group, married people have been consistently happier than unmarried people. And the relationship between health and happiness is both powerful and enduring. Fifty-five per cent of those in poor health report that they are 'not too happy' compared to only 6 per cent of those in excellent health.

Radcliff's argument raises important normative as well as empirical questions. For example, he links happiness to the gratification of basic human needs (85–88). But in some cultures, anyway, it makes a difference how those needs are satisfied: Individuals are expected to do what they can to meet their own needs, with the state stepping in only when they cannot. People who could provide for themselves, but choose not to, are regarded as shirkers, a moral judgment they internalize even as they accept social assistance. Lacking social approval, they tend to lack self-esteem as well. In these circumstances, the relationship between happiness and generous social provision may be far weaker than in cultures where social support is seen as a perfectly acceptable way of life.

At the most theoretical level, one can raise questions about the place of subjective satisfaction in the panoply of choice worthy human goods. Many philosophers have argued that unworthy, even disgraceful acts and ways of life can yield high levels of satisfaction, but that higher-order ways of life are preferable whatever their consequences for subjective satisfaction. 'Better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied', Mill (1991: 140) famously wrote – whatever the fool may think.

This may appear to be a philosopher's rarified view, removed from and irrelevant to ordinary life. But history is replete with episodes in which large numbers of people rejected lives of contented ease in the name of activities they regarded as nobler and more meaningful. As human beings, we desire agency and efficacy, not just the satisfaction of needs. The security, which, at its best, the welfare state can provide, may come at the expense of riskier activities that can offer meaning and purpose to many lives. Perhaps philosophers who distinguish between warranted satisfaction with one's deeds and subjective satisfaction, whatever the source, are not irrelevant to our understanding of the welfare state after all.

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About the Author

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reply to bartels and galston

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doi:10.1057/eps.2015.53

I am honoured that scholars as distinguished as Professors Bartels and Galston are sufficiently interested in my work to take the time to criticize it. I am indeed grateful to them. In what follows, I attempt to respond to their thoughtful comments.

While I do argue the book provides strong and robust evidence in support of its conclusions, I have to say that Professor Bartels imparts to the text an over-confidence (or even smugness) in the empirical results that I hope and trust few others will read into it. The empirical chapters strain to take seriously (and respectfully) all counter-arguments, methodological as well as substantive. The tone of the book is decidedly not one of pronouncing the Truth, but in drawing conclusion from data with all the obvious caveats – and the accompanying humility – that everyone practicing social science understands. I am thus in complete agreement with Bartels when he says that my book should be considered not as a final Answer, but merely a 'first step on a long journey toward developing (and implementing!) a political science of human happiness'.

Still, Bartels is clearly anything but entirely convinced. I will address his objections, in so far as I understand them. Most important, I think, is his suggestion that the empirical analysis is thin. To take but one example, he twice notes that the empirical chapters compromises 'only forty pages'. First, if we are counting, the empirical results take up fifty-six pages. Second, counting pages seems a peculiar metric, especially as it ignores the theoretical chapters, as if the econometric models exist in a vacuum, or if the rest of the book is mere decoration. Third, one wonders how much analysis would be needed to satisfy Bartels. The book reports the full results in table form of fifty-seven regression models; more than that again are discussed in the text, footnotes and appendices. I reply on one of the strongest and best understood estimation methods – pooled time series analysis – with data for both the universe of industrial democracies and a parallel analysis of the American states; the data are analysed at the both individual and aggregate level; they are analysed separately for a variety of population subgroups; there are multiple, repeated checks for robustness at every stage of the analysis; at every point in which one might raise a plausible objection, I have endeavoured to anticipate and analyse such. Doubtless, the analysis may be flawed – I am not the one to judge – but I do not believe it can be called thin.

I have to confess that I also find the econometric issues Bartels stresses peculiar. His suggestion that a 'statistical specification with more than three explanatory variables is meaningless' is decidedly at odds with the way almost everyone else in the social sciences approaches research design. In all quasi-experimental designs, the trade-offs between too few and too many independent variables are well understood, with nearly everyone agreeing that (subject to the nature of one's data, of course) the latter is a typically vastly bigger problem. Indeed, the single most important issue in research designs (outside of experimental contexts) is arguably model specification, with an eye toward avoiding the single most common problem in econometric research: omitted variable bias. Further, in using pooled time series analysis, as I do, surely Professor Bartels is not serious in suggesting (as he seems to) that even including dummies for countries and years is a mistake? I will say simply that the models used in book are similar to the ones used by other scholars in happiness economics, as evidenced by work published in the leading journals in political science, economics and sociology.

Further, Bartels concentrates only on the individual-level models (which appropriately have a relatively large number of control variables), thus ignoring the many models reported in the book that rely on aggregate data, and, thus appropriately have a modest number of predictors. These models are frequently pared down further in reported robustness checks by omitting various variables, precisely to check if such controls were disguising anything (in the way Bartels seems to fear that they somehow are). Thus, even if one were to take Bartels's concerns about models seriously, there is still ample evidence in the book to support my conclusions.

I am sorely tempted to reply to Professor Bartels self-described 'rudimentary' analysis of the data, but having invested much time and energy in writing a book (and a large number of peer reviewed journal articles) in which I have strove to analyse data in what I like to believe is a rigorous and sophisticated fashion, I will let that effort speak for itself.

I have two other observations about Professor Bartels's critique. First, I am puzzled by his dismissal of the many statistical models for the United States I provide, because antidotal evidence suggests that the happiest places (at least on the face of it) are not ones characterized by a generous social safety net or a strong labour movement. In other words, if a casual, ocular test of a bivariate relationship does not correspond to the accumulated evidence from many multivariate econometric models, genuflect toward the former. We do not live in a bivariate world – many things affect life satisfaction (as Bartels at other times makes much of) – and we can only even attempt generalizations when considering all of the data, and all of the relevant explanatory factors, in a rigorous fashion.

Finally, as noted earlier, Professor Bartel's comments are limited entirely to the data analysis in the book. He says nothing about my theoretical discussion of well-being, to say nothing of the theoretical model of how market societies produce and distribute well-being. In judging whether there is a positive connection between happiness and public policy, we cannot look at the data in isolation from the theories which lead us to our models. Just as we cannot (usually) judge the world by bivariate relationships, or make generalizations from case studies, we cannot substantively interpret – or, I would argue, criticize – the results of models outside of a theoretical context.

This is ultimately the root, I believe, of Bartels's scepticism of the empirical results: he interprets them outside of the theoretical arguments that leads to and frames the analysis, the way someone might read the tables in a journal article without reading the text. As much as I value and respect Professor Bartel's comments, I would argue that we might do better in reflecting on the best path on the 'long journey toward … a political science of human happiness' if we remember that this is as much a theoretical as it is an empirical exercise.

Professor Galston does focus more on theoretical mattes, though he too begins with some empirical and estimation issues. I will attempt to address these fairly narrow latter issues as briefly as I can before turning to the more serious theoretical questions.

Galston expresses scepticism about the magnitude of the relationships I report, but offers no reason why my estimates might be mistaken. This is again a point I was careful to both discuss and to test for in multiple contexts. It is one of the conclusions of the book that the magnitude of political factors on happiness exceed individual-level issues – something that may not be comforting, but is supported by the data all the same. He also wonders about the possibility of 'a negative correlation between the security that a welfare state can provide and aggregate levels of unemployment' that it might produce, which is an issue that I also address (and test for). Similarly, he wonders if Employee Protection Legislation (EPL) may benefit only a privileged subset of workers, a possibility that is addressed in the text by including interactions with income (on the presumption that if there is in fact a 'lower-tier' of workers, this ought to be largely reflected in the lower incomes); as the interactions never approach statistical significance, we can conclude that the benefits in well-being from EPL do not vary by income (and thus, at least in large measure, to any tier structure that mirrors income).

Moving on from these matters, Galston raises some more interesting and thought provoking questions. He argues that it might be the case (at least in some cultures) that the happiness is not (as I have argued) primarily determined by the provision of human needs alone – that what also counts is how those needs are provided. Thus, as he notes, it might well be that people who rely on social assistance may be regarded by society, and more importantly, by themselves, as 'shirkers', such that 'the relationship between happiness and generous social provision may be far weaker' in such countries, as opposed to those 'cultures where social support is seen as a perfectly acceptable'.

This is a definite possibility – the social stigma attached to aid in countries like the United States doubtless might reduce the value of aid, though I would argue it is far more likely to affect the eligibility for (or amount of) aid, which touches again on the level or quality of assistance, not its 'moral' character. Thus, I would argue that stigma will manifest itself in the size of the welfare state far more than in the quality of the benefits it provides to the needy (it is difficult to imagine a generous, universalistic welfare state that attaches stigma to the large numbers of people who benefit so handsomely from it). In any case, the most needy – the hungry, the homeless, the jobless – seem likely to benefit substantially from being able to take care of themselves and their children, whatever social norms may be. Similarly, someone who is able to build a better life by accepting, say, educational benefits is likely to notice more the benefits of that education than any stigma that attaches to accepting aid. Further, the country that likely has the greatest level of stigmatization is the United States, and the results of the data analysis across the American States parallels that of the cross-national study. Galston may have a point, but if in fact the diminution of social benefits that comes from stigmatization is sufficient to dramatically affect their contribution to happiness, we should fail to see that higher levels of welfare spending are associated with higher levels of happiness in the United States. That I find instead the same strong and consistent relationship as we see in the cross-national data suggests that this is not a major concern. Indeed, if there were strong differences in the magnitude of the relationship between the welfare state and well-being in the cross-national data, this would have been apparent, but it is not.

Finally, Galston raises the truly fundamental question of whether life satisfaction is indeed the appropriate evaluative metric by which to judge the quality of human life. I might quibble with the way the question is posed, as when Galston notes that 'As human beings, we desire agency and efficacy, not just the satisfaction of needs', as I am at pains to conceive of efficacy and agency as human needs (and ones that social democracy is especially capable of fulfilling at that). Still, such quibbling aside, Professor Galston is indeed touching on a matter of great normative and theoretical concern, and I by no means dismiss his questioning of using a satisfying life as the best yardstick by which to judge.

'Better', he quotes J. S. Mill as saying, 'to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied.' I would only reply that these are not the only options. Surely it would be better to be a satisfied Socrates than a dissatisfied Socrates. I imagine, further, we will have more people with the inspiring aspects of Socrates's character in those societies that provide the basic protections and opportunities in life we associate with social democracy.

About the Author

Benjamin Radcliff is Professor of political science at the University of Notre Dame. His articles have appeared in the *British Journal of Political Science, American Political Science Review, American Journal of Political Science, Journal of Politics, Perspectives on Politics* and *Social Forces*, among many other journals.