Contentment and Modernity:

A Comparative Critique of

Zygmunt Bauman and Jürgen Habermas

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Thesis submitted to the Discipline of Sociology, School of Social and Policy Studies in the Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences, Flinders University in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

December, 2012

I certify that this work does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text

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Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been possible without the help of a number of very generous and thoughtful people.

First, I must thank my supervisors, Professor Anthony Elliott and Associate Professor Mary Holmes, for their tireless efforts in guiding me through the last four years. As my principal supervisor, Anthony's contributions were indispensable. It has been a privilege to work with someone whose expertise in the field of social theory is of such a high level, and I am sure that I will continue to learn from his work in the years to come. I must thank Mary for her thoughtful and considered feedback, and for helping me to decipher my own ideas over countless cups of coffee. I could not have done this without Mary's insightful and dedicated support. I also need to thank Dr Suzi Adams for her feedback and advice, I am sure that without her contributions this thesis would lack the diversity of ideas and sources that it has today.

I would like to thank my parents, Jillian and John, for always encouraging my passion for learning and for their feedback throughout the development of this thesis, particularly in the final stages. And to my sisters Hayley and Brianna, I am always thankful for their support and encouragement.

Perhaps most importantly, I must thank my partner Meg for her love, generosity and patience over the last four years. I wish I could say that the chaos was about to end, but I think that it is only just beginning.

Finally, I must thank my fellow postgraduate students at Flinders University for providing an exciting and lively student culture. And I must thank the staff of Flinders Sociology more generally for their ongoing support and guidance.

Abstract

This thesis aims to challenge popular conceptions of the 'good life' with an analysis of contentment and happiness through the lens of social and critical theory. As an alternative to empirical and philosophical methods of understanding well-being or virtue, this project will undertake a theoretical analysis of contentment as a form of social experience. My intention here is to understand why it is that with significant technological, political and scientific advances in recent decades, individuals seem to be experiencing increasing levels of discontentment. A crucial element of this project refers to the notion of society as 'post-scarcity' in that the object of inquiry in this thesis involves the maladies of individuals who, on a global scale, are fortunate enough to experience social conditions that do not involve war, famine or poverty. This thesis will focus on individuals who are well placed to enjoy the advancements that modernity has to offer. It is not the intention of this thesis to *solve* the *problem* of discontentment, but rather to provide an analysis of the individual's relationship with society and an understanding of why this relationship is not more fulfilling. This daunting task has been scaled down to a comparative critique of Jürgen Habermas and Zygmunt Bauman, two exemplary social theorists who have wrestled with matters of meaning and knowledge for decades. Through the application of Habermas and Bauman's work, the nature of contentment will be explored through a critical evaluation of modernity, whilst at the same time showing how their unique approaches to social theory are ideally placed to engage with questions of this sort. Habermas and Bauman have been selected specifically for their critical dissections of modernity and, despite their significant differences, for their dedication to supporting the autonomy of individuals from oppressive structures.

Introduction: Contentment and Modernity

> The most esteemed personal qualities, such as independence, will to freedom,
> sympathy, and the sense of justice, are social as well as individual virtues. The
> fully developed individual is the consummation of a fully developed society
> (Horkheimer 1947: 135).

In its simplest form, the aim of this thesis is to develop a comparative critique of Zygmunt Bauman and Jürgen Habermas through a specific focus on the question of contentment in modernity. The topic of contentment will serve as a theme through which aspects of Bauman and Habermas's ideas can be compared and critiqued. As a result, this analysis intends to show that social and critical theory has much to contribute to a sociological understanding of contentment and happiness. There is nothing controversial about the claim that privileged societies have been fascinated by questions of the good life for hundreds, or even thousands of years. Historically, these questions tend to arise in circumstances where the basic needs of individuals have been met to such a degree that their attention can turn to questions regarding the meaning and purpose of their existence. Yet, in the modern first world, individuals seem to be experiencing two lives simultaneously; in one they are more privileged and safer from harm than ever before, whilst in the other, there are economic, environmental and political conditions that hint at the potential for substantial change to occur at any moment. The result is an intersection of tensions that turns questions of meaning, legitimation and contentment into ambiguous and problematic notions within the relationship between the individual and society. The question as to why the relationship between the individual and society is not more fulfilling is therefore highly relevant to an understanding of modernity. The allusive nature of contentment in modernity will serve as the object of analysis in this thesis. Yet I will argue that although questions of contentment and 'the good life' have traditionally drawn upon the work of

philosophers and psychologists, it will be the contributions that can be extracted from social and critical theory that are most significant at this stage.

This thesis will develop an understanding of contentment that is rooted in social experience. By employing a critical approach to constructions of the good life, this project will look to the experience of modern western social life in order to better understand why, despite radical improvements in civil rights, living standards and technological capabilities, individuals seem to be less satisfied. This is not a neat or orderly task, and so this project will endeavour to avoid oversimplifying the enormously complex nature of social life by utilising a distinctly sociological perspective. Marcuse put forward a very similar question in *An Essay on Liberation* (1969), albeit with a more radical terminology. He writes:

> ...the question is no longer: how can the individual satisfy his own needs without hurting others, but rather: how can he satisfy his needs without hurting himself, without reproducing, through his aspirations and satisfactions, his dependence on an exploitative apparatus, which in satisfying his needs, perpetuates his servitude (Marcuse 1969: 4).

This could be seen as reconfiguring the question posed by Freud in *Civilisation and its Discontents* (1930) regarding the nature of the good life in relation to social conditions, influences and disturbances. The point raised by these approaches is that questions such 'what is the good life?' or 'how can I live a good life?' overlook the simple fact that the good life itself, is a culturally specific ideal that functions as a social construction. Therefore, the question of 'what is the good life?' is fundamentally a question about society, or more directly, the individual's relationship with it. It is a matter of how the individual is able to positively place themselves in regard to social values and norms.

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To investigate the nature of contentment in modernity, this thesis will take the form of a comparative critique of the work of Jürgen Habermas and Zygmunt Bauman within the broader scope of critical theory. The comparison of these two prolific social theorists is motivated by a number of factors regarding the

unique intersections of ideas where the two meet. Yet there is also a need to limit this analysis to the work of two theorists to manage the sprawling and ongoing nature of the subject matter. As a result, this thesis will focus upon the contributions of Habermas and Bauman with regard to an understanding of contentment. The decision to focus on these two theorists is motivated by their longstanding contributions to critical sociology and the human consequences of modernity. Arguably, Bauman has done more to capture the unique maladies of the modern individual than any other critical theorist, meanwhile, the scope and painstaking organisation of Habermas's project is unparalleled. The diverse and comprehensive range of topics covered by each author places them as ideal representatives of their disparate approaches to social theory. Although a similar project could be constructed with any number of social theorists – such as Žižek, Castoriadis, Giddens, Arendt or Benhabib – this task will simply have to wait for a project sizeable enough for such scope. For now, a comparison of Habermas and Bauman is ideally suited to show how differing approaches to social theory can broach the emotional consequences of living in modernity. Rather than forcing Habermas and Bauman into a unified perspective, this thesis will borrow from Bauman's concerns regarding ambivalence, contingency and ethics, and contrast them with Habermas's work on public sphere discourse and civic participation. Somewhere between these perspectives is a theoretical understanding of the individual's relationship with society that is both absent and desperately needed in the study of contentment, happiness and well-being.

This thesis will be divided into seven chapters that informally create two distinct sections. The first section will consist of four chapters that will set out the foundational elements of this thesis and position the key theorists with regard to their contributions to the matter of contentment. This will, in some cases, require the application of ideas in a manner that is divergent from the initial intention of the theorist. Habermas in particular has not written directly on the matter of happiness or contentment, save for a select few comments.

And so, the thesis begins with a chapter on critical theory and contentment that establishes critique as a means to understand social problems such as discontentment. Chapter one will develop the relationship between reason and contentment as well as dissecting the nature of coercion in modernity regarding the autonomy of individuals. The motivation for such an approach is – just as it was for Marx – associated with the need to understand society for the purpose of understanding and addressing social problems. Chapters two and three will serve as a detailed exegesis of Habermas and Bauman's work (respectively) and its applicability to the question of contentment. These chapters will adopt a general introduction to the work of these theorists and establish a number of perspectives to be dissected more specifically later in the thesis. Such an explanation is particularly necessary as there are instances where the work of these theorists is used in ways that differ from their original intentions. Consequently, Chapters two and three will highlight the aspects of Habermas and Bauman's work that are particularly significant in developing the concept of contentment. In the case of Habermas, this involves a discussion of meaning and legitimation concerning the need for democratic participation and public discourse. For Bauman however, the focus is directed towards the contradictions of modernity and the challenges of a fast paced and liquid modern world. Yet for both theorists, matters of ambivalence and inequality are always present. Chapter four will trace the question of discontentment, and its social origins, from Freud's *Civilisation and Its Discontents* (1930) through to Bauman's *Postmodernity and Its Discontents* (1998). Chapter four will consider notions of the relationship between the individual and society and the implications of a truly socialised individual.

The final three chapters will form the second half of the thesis and will seek to more succinctly develop the unique arguments of this thesis. Chapter five will focus on a comparative critique of Bauman and Habermas that directly assesses their disagreements and identifies the most applicable aspects of their work. To date, there is little published material that compares Habermas and Bauman, however this chapter will also draw on relevant critiques from other theorists.

Chapter six forms an analysis of the contributions from Bauman and Habermas on the matter of hermeneutics in order to better grasp the importance of knowledge and interpretation in the construction of meaning. The intention here is to tie together critical notions of the systematic distortion of information with the potential for a greater understanding of hermeneutical analysis. The connection between knowledge and meaning is of particular significance throughout the thesis and it is in this chapter that this notion is assessed in depth. Finally, chapter seven will contextualise and modernise this primarily theoretical project by considering the overwhelming social transformation of globalisation. This chapter will also consider the most recent contributions of Bauman and Habermas, whilst assessing the applicability of their ideas against the backdrop of fairness as an indicator of contentment. The conclusions reached in this final chapter defend the importance of democratic participation as well as political and civil autonomy, over the understanding of modern progress as economic development. The concluding summary warrants a degree of optimism that serves as a welcome change from much of the material discussed in this project.

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The thesis will develop an understanding of happiness and contentment that is rooted in sociological analysis – something that is currently underdeveloped in the field. Put simply, happiness and contentment can be seen as contributors to a good life, and as a result, the analysis of contentment in this thesis must be contextualised with the bigger picture of social experience. In the sociological tradition there are several recurring aspects of the good life that are easily identifiable; such as autonomy, equality, community and polity. Yet, the intention here is to avoid making claims regarding the nature of the good life as if the findings of this analysis can unveil a picture of what contentment ought to look like. Instead, this thesis will aim to describe contentment as a socially constructed condition of the good life, and it will therefore consider the potential for problems to occur in this process. This approach is motivated by the need for *Verstehen* in the study of contentment, rather than assessing contentment with the terminology of 'ought' statements and virtues – as is

often seen in philosophical debates. As sociology has traditionally been viewed as a response to identified social problems, the matter of contentment in modernity is in many ways a topic that is ripe for sociological analysis. In particular, it will be discussed here as a means to evaluate the validity and applicability of Habermas and Bauman's social theory. Additionally, this thesis seeks to understand how a normative construction of contentment which is capable of being beneficial to individuals at a social level, may be developed.

I must be clear about the specific problem that this project hopes to address. It is widely acknowledged among social theorists (Bauman 2008; Sennett 1970, 1998; Benhabib 1992), critical theorists (Marcuse 1964, 1969; Adorno 1974), psychologists (Horwitz & Wakefield 2007; Haybron 2006), psychoanalysts (Freud 1928; Kristeva 1989; Žižek 2003), empirical social researchers (Veenhoven 2008; Easterlin 2001) and economists (Layard 2005; Peiro 2006) that there is something awry with happiness in modernity. These widely varying fields provide a range of approaches for understanding the problematic of happiness, and from these approaches come a multitude of possible solutions. Despite the differences in terminology and the variety of different forms of evidence among these perspectives, there is some agreement that people do not seem to be as happy as they *should* be, or in other words, as happy as one might expect given the advances of modernity in recent decades. If we consider the contributions of Bauman and Habermas in more detail, a set of themes become clear. For Habermas, the depoliticisation of the modern individual and the distortions in knowledge immediately come to mind. Whereas for Bauman the dangers of living in an ever changing liquid modernity, alongside the numbing ambivalence of a modernity full of contradictions are also easily identified. Meanwhile the matter of rationalisation is present in the work of both theorists, albeit in rather unique applications. The language here is already somewhat problematic and so there are certain presumptions I would prefer to avoid; such as the idea that individuals are *meant* to be happy, that society is *responsible* for breeding

happiness or that some degree of unhappiness is not a natural part of life. This project proposes a modified terminology that distinguishes happiness from

contentment in order to better understand the social causes and social meaning of this rather troubling situation. An explanation of this terminology is necessary before I go any further.

There is a tendency for theorists and researchers to use the term happiness as a blanket concept to describe experiences that contribute to the 'good life'. However, in this project I would like to develop a crucial distinction between happiness and contentment as different but equally important contributors to the good life. The distinction utilised in this project recognises the difference between pleasure driven, temporary and individualised forms of happiness and socially defined and motivated forms of contentment. In this sense, contentment is a unique concept because it refers to the satisfaction one feels regarding their relationship with the social world. Therefore, contentment is not a moment of relief or joy, but a mode of self-understanding within a larger social context that contributes to an individual's sense of identity and their positive evaluation of their place in the world. Contentment in this sense means more than simply being content with material possessions – for example, "I feel content with my television because I do not desire a better one" – rather it refers to an almost Epicurean notion of being at peace with something, specifically, the relationship between the individual and society[1]. Therefore, contentment does not involve the fulfilment of needs and wants, but a reflexive evaluation of needs and wants. This is in contrast to happiness for a number of reasons, but the most important distinction in this thesis is concerning the role of *context*. To an extent, happiness is hedonistic in that it pursues pleasure with some degree of disregard to shared social values, such as the normative views on gluttony, greed or laziness. I should be clear however, that the problem is not that happiness is an essential part of the good life, but that modernity radically prioritises happiness over contentment. A distinction of this sort is not entirely new; in *Utilitarianism*, Mill describes contentment as being happiness within the context of need, meanwhile Freedman describes the unique difference between "fun, pleasure and excitement" on the one hand and "peace

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[1] Although this can not understate the importance of conflict in the construction of notions of contentment. This matter is discussed in some detail throughout the thesis, particularly in Chapter one.

of mind" on the other (Lane 2000: 15). Freud described happiness as the release of the tensions that build up in everyday life, whilst he reserved the word contentment for the socially dependent notions of fulfilment (1930). Veenhoven makes a similar claim regarding what he considers to be the two 'kinds' of happiness; the affective element that contributes to the pleasure one experiences and the cognitive element which is dependent on the correlation between what an individual wants from life and what they have, which he also calls contentment (2008). I have simply applied my own specific terminology here in order to clarify a broad range of different terminologies employed by the theorists utilised in this project.

I intend to show that there is no crisis over happiness in modernity, but rather one of contentment. In fact, it seems that modern society is filled with an almost unending range of products, services and guides that will contribute to happiness. But without context, happiness struggles to provide meaning and long-term satisfaction[2]. A new flat screen television might make an individual feel happy, but it is a feeling of contentment that allows the individual to feel as though they have *enough*. And without that context, happiness is destined to leave individuals unfulfilled and their well-being incomplete. The argument behind this thesis is for a more effective social construction of contentment that is capable of fostering the legitimation of meaning in modern life. This is not to say that there are not already people who feel the contentment described here, but rather that the priorities and direction of society more generally, do not sufficiently value the importance of contentment. This should not be read as a call for the return of a bygone era, rather that sources of meaning that were once deemed to be fixed and objective – such as religion and tradition – are gradually being dismantled by the development of modernity. As a result, the need for meaningful and reflexive social constructions to allow for legitimation becomes indispensable. Although there is little doubt that individuals are

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[2] The empirical studies showing the power of relativity in happiness studies is evidence of this. See Birckman & Coates (1978) and Easterlin (1994) for examples of how raised living standards paired with raised expectations resulted in no significant changes to self reported well-being. Also see Veenhoven (1991) for a critique of this approach. Yet, from all of these studies there is an under appreciation for the need to study the social rather than simply the individual.

already engaging with these dilemmas, a theoretical understanding of how this happens and how it can be understood more effectively is of crucial importance.

It is necessary to clarify that this is not a study of depression as an identified condition, but an analysis of discontent that is not limited to a diagnosed minority. I would like to take this point a step further and suggest that the recent increase in reported cases of depression and anxiety can be linked to changes in social conditions[3]. This kind of approach is deeply sociological as it calls for an analysis of more than just the individual within a significant and clear social trend toward a particular outcome. Ian Craib links the experience of living in modernity to a failure of being able to productively deal with disappointment; "This inability" he states, "involves a difficulty in accepting depression, despair and conflict ...as a part of life" (1994: 158). Later in this thesis, the inability for individuals to deal with the negative aspects of modernity will be considered through the work of Zygmunt Bauman, but for now the most interesting aspect of that quote is in reference to the inevitability of depression and therefore the need to accept its position in normal and healthy social experience. The distinction made by Horwitz and Wakefield in *The Loss of Sadness* (2007) between sadness 'with cause' as opposed to sadness 'without cause' can contribute to this understanding of the way that depression is culturally and socially mediated. Horwitz and Wakefield are critical of the lack of contextual recognition in the diagnosis of depression in the United States and they link this individualistic understanding of everyday life to the dramatic rise in reported cases of depression and mood disorders. Statistically speaking, one in five people in Australia have suffered from a mood, anxiety or substance use disorder in the last 12 months, whilst 43 per cent reported experiencing at least one of these disorders at some point in their lives (ABS 2007). Yet, in studies of increasing cases of anxiety disorders, it is rarely mentioned that we live in unprecedentedly anxious times and that the development of anxiety disorders might be a perfectly natural response to this.

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[3] Despite the differing views regarding the nature of depression and happiness in modernity, the notion that depression is increasingly reported and that this can be linked to social factors is widely agreed upon. See Veenhoven (2010); Lane (2000).

The same could be said for stress or low self-esteem, as there are deeply social indicators for many of the diagnosed disorders that appear to be on the rise. My argument is that there are social factors that have influenced the increasingly common feeling that something is missing from the experience of modern life. Therefore, problems such as this indicate issues that are inherently social rather than individual, and therefore society itself is arguably more deserving of analysis.

It is important to note that this project will not draw heavily from the recent influx of empirical data on happiness and well-being. At this stage, there is considerable evidence that both reported happiness and well-being are in decline in the first world, yet the nature of these studies often results in problematic explanations regarding the cause. There are a number of reasons why I will not engage significantly with these studies, and they will be mentioned briefly here. First, there are compromising inconsistencies regarding the definitions of happiness and well-being that, even when reconciled among researchers, cannot be guaranteed to be fully understood by the respondents to research programs. This leads to a second concern; there is cause for scepticism regarding the ability for individuals to accurately comment on their own happiness or well-being. This will be discussed in more detail throughout this thesis, but for now it is worth noting the influence of relativity and context in self reported data regarding happiness. Third, there are very few agreed upon correlations between aspects of one's life and their reported happiness or well-being, across the variety of available data sets. Testing for factors such as income, education level and marital status results in varied outcomes depending on the study. The question, 'Is there a correlation between wealth and well-being?' is enormously problematic in a study of social values as it is focused on the symptoms of the problem rather than the cause or the problem itself. Studies that aim to show correlations between employment or marital status and reported well-being, are in fact saying very little about the nature of discontentment in modernity. What is more interesting are questions like 'How happy are you with your financial situation?' – the results for which have shown a consistent decline in the US, and have hit an all time low following the 2009 market crisis (Smith 2011). Questions such as this measure happiness

or well-being against the expectations of the individual and are therefore more telling in regard to the social elements of the good life. As a result, this project considers the values of individuals to be more important in understanding contentment than demographics or classifications. Hyman and Patulny reach a similar conclusion in their distinction between 'generalised' and 'particularised' measurements of happiness as the subjective perceptions involved with self-reporting happiness research often lack the contextual aptitude to draw meaningful conclusions (2007). The ability for individuals to be reflexive, unpredictable and deeply emotional demands that questions regarding contentment must be approached within a social context and not reduced to simplified independent variables. Yet this is inherently sociological as it takes into account the social context of the individual and is attempting to understand the problems associated with contentment.

This thesis seeks to provide a framework within which social theory can conduct a critical analysis of modern concepts of contentment, with the intention of moving towards a greater understanding of an ambiguous problem. A core element of this argument considers perspectives from psychological, philosophical and empirical knowledge to be incomplete without the input of social theory, and therefore must be considered inadequate for providing a thorough understanding. Consequently, this project will take seriously the notion that there has been a dramatic change in the experience of social life over recent generations. For individual identity, relationships, the construction of norms and ethics, and the interpretation of meaning in modernity, there has been a radical shift that has changed the experience of living in society today.

This should not be confused with an evaluation of which generation might be luckier or more fortunate, but rather an acknowledgement that the current generation face challenges that are radically different to those of their grandparents. The most relevant change regarding this is the notion that the justification of acts, desires and goals, has become elusive. Individuals are faced with a greater number of decisions and the perceived responsibility for choosing correctly lies solely with them. In an era of constant change,

individuals are struggling to grab hold of anything for long enough to find meaning and validation within it.

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As previously mentioned, what I am proposing is not a picture of what the good life might look like or of what contentment really is, but an analysis of why a more effective construction of contentment has not yet been developed. This highlights my hesitation to describe discontentment as a problem – as this terminology implies that there is a solution – or that there is a response that should be applied. Accordingly, the terminology of social 'problematics' – as described by Johann Arnason (1989; 1990)[4] – provides a more accurate description as it refers to the ongoing need for evaluation and consideration. With Arnason's approach, contentment reflects the individual's perception of their relationship with society and therefore developing a sociological analysis of contentment depends upon a thorough understanding how individuals understand themselves within a social context.

In order to construct a positive self-understanding from a social context, the individual must utilise both knowledge and meaning. Knowledge that is refined and validated through a process of reason and logic is essential in order for the individual to feel as though what they know about the world is trustworthy. This is made particularly important in the process of ensuring that the individual is not manipulated or coerced, through ideology or myth, into becoming a means to someone else's ends. If the individual cannot believe in what they think to be true, then there is little hope for a positive construction of their relationship with society. Habermas's work on knowledge and legitimation, alongside Bauman's hermeneutics and his work on the legislators and interpreters of society, are both of significance here – as is the long-

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[4] This terminology also appears in the work of Peter Wagner with the notion of *problématique* whereby problems are identified that do not necessarily have solutions (2008: 15). To think of certain issues – such as modernity in the case of Wagner and democracy in the case of Arnason – as having solutions is to overlook the complexity of social mechanisms and to project a sense of ought onto social matters.

standing tradition of the unwavering dedication to reason from the key figures of the Frankfurt School.

Yet, an analysis of the social use of knowledge would be insufficient in this project without the incorporation of meaning. Habermas himself claims that information alone cannot motivate human action; it requires a theoretical element that intertwines knowledge with priorities and values (1962). Therefore, the elucidation of the connections between meaning and knowledge are essential to the formation of a meaningful self-understanding for the individual. This speaks to the inherently emotional and creative aspects of the individual in a way that allows for an ongoing and reflexive interpretation of meaning. To some degree, this entire project can be seen as a means to rethink the prospects of meaning in a liquid modern age – using Bauman's terminology – whilst insisting on a vigilantly critical pursuit of knowledge for its own sake – as discussed by Habermas. Just as knowledge without meaning fails to legitimise the experiences of individuals, meaning without reliable knowledge becomes a kind of blind faith that is vulnerable to numerous kinds of limitations for the intellectual and civil autonomy of the individual. Contentment is therefore the composite of reason and knowledge with meaning and emotion.

Arguably, the two key theorists in this thesis, Bauman and Habermas, have spent their careers working on the problems of knowledge and meaning. What I am aiming to contribute is an in-depth analysis and to some degree, a hybridisation of the two that will show how a more productive notion of contentment can be construed, and an analysis of why this hasn't happened yet.

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A final word regarding the placement of this project within the broad and interdisciplinary field of happiness studies is necessary at this point. Although this thesis will intentionally pursue a theoretically focused analysis of the individual's relationship with society and the repercussions for contentment and happiness, there are contributions from more empirically driven sources that are valuable both to this project and to the field in general. The

contributions of Michael Rustin (2007) and Robert Lane (2000) undertake the difficult challenge of trying to empirically study happiness and contentment; and they do so with regard to social values and norms. Yet the extent to which social and critical theory has been left out of many of these studies is alarming when we consider the vast literature on the matter. Richard Layard, a leading researcher in the field of happiness studies, presented a series of lectures in 2003 titled 'Happiness: Has Social Science a Clue?' and on the surface, I tend to agree with his premise. Unfortunately, Layard dramatically missed the point regarding the trouble with developing knowledge about happiness. I agree that it should be of great interest to social scientists, that as the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has increased, the percentage of people reporting that they are 'very happy' has decreased, but Layard's methods in explaining this phenomenon radically undervalue the significance of social life. At no point in this three part lecture series, does Layard consult the theoretical literature on discontentment, and sadly this is not uncommon as the field of happiness studies is largely occupied by economists. This project intends to make clear the potential for a theoretical analysis of the problems regarding contentment and happiness in modernity without reducing the troubles of the individual to independent variables. It is my contention that many of the problems associated with empirical studies of happiness and contentment can be resolved through the application of a stronger theoretical foundation of the key concepts of the debate. Although such a task would be too ambitious for this one project, the idea of making some contribution to this cause is a key motivating factor for this study.

The ideal outcome of this project is not an answer to the question of what is contentment or the good life, but a step towards developing an understanding of how the relationship between the individual and society can be enhanced through a socially relevant application of contentment. It is more a matter of how contentment functions rather than what contentment truly *is* in some kind of objective sense. Take this Epicurean proverb as an example,

"Do not spoil what you have by desiring what you have not; remember that what you now have was once among the things you only hoped for."

This perspective differs significantly from the rationale of modernity whereby more is more and yesterday isn't soon enough. Accordingly, how might a society go about adopting this kind of approach to contentment, and why hasn't it been adopted yet, despite the common-sense and agreeable nature of the claim? These are the kinds of questions that will be assessed in this thesis as the ideal of democratic participation in the social construction of meaning is taken to be of the upmost importance.